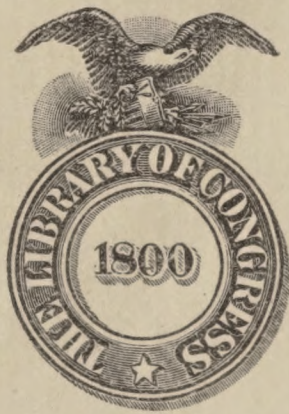


MICHAEL CARMICHAEL



MILES SANDYS



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"PLEASE, DO NOT COME ANY NEARER." — PAGE 266.

Michael Carmichael

35- A Story of Love and Mystery

By
Miles Sandys

“Character is what we are in the dark.”

Graphically Illustrated

Laird & Lee, Chicago

PZ3
S2225M

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PREFACE

AS TO THE LATE MICHAEL CARMICHAEL.

It is well known that the late Mr. Michael Carmichael, having no living relatives, made a will bequeathing all his property, personal and real, to Tudorville College, to become a part of the permanent endowment of that institution. There was a condition annexed to the will, to-wit, that the narrative contained in the following pages be printed and published, the proceeds, if any, to be given to the local society for the prevention of vice. As president of the board of trustees for the college, I was named in the will as executor. In the interests of the institution, it becomes my duty to see that the condition of the bequest is fully performed. Strictly speaking, my duty ends with the publication of the book, yet, because of the extraordinary character of the narrative, it may be that a few words of comment from me will be acceptable to the readers—especially to such of them as did not know Mr. Carmichael personally.

It may interest them to know that, while a young man, he suddenly gave up his practice here and went to the Western country. Why he went and where, was

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never known with certainty. It is also true that he returned some years later, quite suddenly and unexpectedly. He resumed the practice of his profession and prospered financially, so that he was accounted a rich man. From the time of his return to the day of his death, he was prominent in church affairs. Yet, to the end of his life, public opinion was divided on the question of his sincerity. He had enemies who did not hesitate to say that he was a cold-blooded, sleek, demure hypocrite, who wore the livery of heaven that he might better serve the devil. On the other hand, his numerous friends called attention to the fact that he was, in his outward life, neither lewd, profane nor a drinker; that he was constant in his attendance at church, and strictly honest in the payment of his debts. There were always rumors, dark and ugly, touching that period of his life covered by his sojourn in the West. Whether true or false, these rumors were strong enough, at a critical time, to defeat him in his candidacy for an important office. It was, as I believe, while smarting from the sting of this defeat, that he began this narrative. Concerning the story itself there are two theories: What may be called the charitable theory, and what is called, by his friends and admirers, the uncharitable theory.

First, as to the charitable theory. While it is, as I have said, highly probable that he began to relate the facts as they actually occurred, it is also possible that,

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by the time he had written the first three chapters, the pride of authorship tempted him aside, as it were, into the by-paths of fiction, so that he ended by writing a novel, where he had intended to write a history. If it be objected to this, that he would hardly give his own name to the principal character in a mere novel, it must not be forgotten that he did not begin it as a novel. If he had lived, he might have revised his manuscript, giving that character another name.

Second, as to the uncharitable theory. This is the theory that he has written the truth, that the book is no novel, but a true history of the life of Mr. Carmichael during several years. It is not easy to believe that a man would write such things about himself, however true they might be. Still more difficult to understand why, having written them, he should be so determined to have them published. Yet who is able to say of human vanity, "Thus far it can go, and beyond this it cannot go?" The every day experiences of life prove, over and over again, that the rascal is ever the vainest of men, as full of egotism as an egg is full of meat. To tell a story like this, in an able manner, may have been a temptation too strong for Mr. Carmichael to resist. His best friends must, in fact, admit he was manifestly vain of his undoubted intellectual powers.

In conclusion I wish to say:

1. If this story is a novel there can, of course, be

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but one opinion of the principal character. He is, from first to last, a fit companion for his accomplice and alleged tempter, Gilbert. In the end he did not get what he deserved, but he certainly deserved all he got.

2. If the story is true in every part; if it was really written as a vindication of the conduct of Michael Carmichael in his relation to the persons and events herein described, it signally fails of its purpose.

On either theory it is not hard to understand why it was not published in the lifetime of the man who wrote it.

Respectfully,

JOHN LISLE.

Tudorville, January, 19—.

MICHAEL CARMICHAEL.

CHAPTER I.

GOPHER CITY.

I was only nineteen years old when I completed the course of study in our college here. Young as I was, I stood at the head of my class and received its highest honors. I then entered the law office of General Erastus Coldbank, as a law student. My close application to my studies, and the readiness with which my mind seemed to grasp the deepest principles of jurisprudence, astonished and delighted my venerable preceptor. On my twenty-first birthday I applied for a license to practice law in the courts of my native state. I was subjected to a very rigid examination as to my qualifications, and was happily able to demonstrate my fitness for my chosen profession to the entire satisfaction of the veteran members of the bar appointed to examine me. Unfortunately for me, I was seized, about this time, with what we used to call the "Western fever." Instead of settling down to the practice of the law, in my native town, as I should have done, I decided to go to Gopher City, which was then at the height of that phenomenal prosperity

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which made it, for a time, the Mecca of all adventurous spirits.

Of my life in Gopher City I can say little here. It is only of the cause of my leaving there that I desire to write at this time. To state this, briefly as possible, is a duty I owe to myself and to my friends. From time to time highly colored, grossly inaccurate statements of that affair have been circulated in this community; and there is no disguising the fact that these reports have been set afloat with the design of hurting my reputation. I am now persuaded that the time has come for me to tell the plain, unvarnished truth. The truth cannot injure me as much as the fantastic lies told by my enemies.

Europe, Asia, Africa, Polynesia, most of the larger towns in the United States, and many of the smaller ones, were represented in the population of Gopher City. A wicked town, I grieve to say—as wicked as any this side of the place where the worm dieth not.

It would afford me much pleasure to refute, one by one, the senseless calumnies concerning my manner of life in Gopher City. It has been said that I was a “blackleg,” a “bully,” “cruel as Satan,” “rapacious as a wolf,”—and so on, down a very long catalogue of possible and impossible sins and shortcomings. Not a word of truth in any of these charges. All heartless, brutal calumnies. The truth is that—I may say it with-

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out boasting—I moved in the best society the place afforded. It may be that, in some minor points, our notions of refinement and culture were not up to the Eastern standards, assuming that Eastern standards are infallible; but, such as our best society was, I was in it and of it; and I was not its most insignificant or least conspicuous member. This is all I care to say on this subject at this time.

In the practice of my profession I prospered beyond my most sanguine expectations. I had an elegantly furnished office over the Rock Crystal saloon, which was then by far the most aristocratic establishment of the kind in Gopher City. It has long been a matter of regret to me that I should have chosen such a place for my business. Really, from a financial standpoint, it was what local newspapers described as a “good stand,” and that was a prime consideration with me in those days. Alas, I was yet in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity.

I had not been there long before the mayor and board of aldermen appointed me to the office of city counselor; thus I had the honor to be officially connected with the town in the days of its greatest splendor and prosperity. I might, if I could spare the time, give many interesting details of our practice there, for the courts were by no means the dull, uninteresting places they are in the staid, conservative East. I

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must content myself with the remark that I easily fell into the ways of the country, doing a maximum of business with a minimum of personal injury.

June is the beginning of months, as far as this history is concerned, for it was three o'clock, on a balmy June morning, when I committed that unfortunate deed which has ever since been, to me, a cause of the bitterest regret. It all happened in the "card parlor" of the Rock Crystal saloon. This was a large apartment reserved exclusively for the use of card players. It ran parallel with the saloon proper, the entire length of the building. Between it and the bar-room there was, in the partition, a wide curtained doorway, so that patrons of the bar might pass conveniently to the card tables, while the patrons of the card tables were in easy reach of the bar. Either room might be entered from the street. The house was a wooden structure in the middle of a block of wooden buildings.

I was seated at one of the tables in this "parlor." With me were the mayor, the town marshal, and the town clerk, so that ours was what might be called an "administration party." We were engaged in a game which, if I do not forget, was called "poker." "Draw poker" was, I believe, what they called it in those days. It may even yet be known by that name, for anything I know to the contrary.

The mayor owned the saloon. He was a highly-

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respected citizen. He was rich, and he had every prospect of becoming richer; the Rock Crystal saloon was called, by the people of Gopher City, "the best paying gold mine in the West." It follows that he was a man of much influence in the community; and therefore I had taken care to be on good terms with him. We had grown to be very intimate, our relations, personal and official, being of the most cordial nature. He was a man of some culture, but was chiefly admired for his personal courage, which was very great. His judgment, in the particular kind of game we were playing, was held in such high regard that not many people in Gopher City would play against him. When the mayor took a hand, the game ceased to be, in the opinion of many people, a game of chance. He had a temper which may be described as Satanic. This was his greatest fault and, as it proved, his greatest misfortune. The most remarkable thing about him, when moved to anger, was his manner of expressing his wrath. A quiet man under ordinary circumstances, he became, if possible, a little more quiet under the influence of rage. A pale man, ordinarily, he would grow a little paler as his indignation waxed hot. A fluent man at most times, his language, when angered, became something more than mere fluency; it rose almost to the dignity of eloquence. He had a wonderful vocabulary of abusive

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words and a way of fitting and applying them to the matter in hand that was marvelous. No thoughtful, educated man could listen to him for five minutes, under such circumstances, without being profoundly impressed with the awful possibilities of invective that lie in the English tongue. His friends who were, as I have been informed, so indignant about what they were pleased to call the "deep damnation of his taking off," must have realized that Gopher City was no favorable environment for a man of his peculiar talents.

As I remember this man, he was tall, with dark, brown beard trimmed to a point—what is called a Vandyke beard, I believe. His name—or his alleged name, was Smith.

I cannot be expected, I hope, after all these years, to describe exactly the nature of the fault which I inadvertantly committed in the playing of this game, on that occasion. I remember that I had been losing—which was rather unusual with me. Losing money at cards is not, I am glad to say, among the vain regrets of my life, for, as a matter of fact, my gains at Gopher City were, altogether, in excess of my losses. On this night, however, I had lost—not heavily, yet more than was agreeable.

There is, if my memory is not at fault, a peculiar situation in this game where they have on the board

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what they call a "jack-pot." I cannot now describe the situation, nor the nature of the fault I committed—except that, without in the least intending to do wrong, I offered to "open the pot" without holding the cards required by the rules of the game. I had, in some unaccountable way, mistaken the value of my hand.

It was the mayor who detected my supposed attempt at cheating. I presume he really believed I was trying to cheat, but he should at least have given me a chance to explain. I know not what had aroused his suspicions, but his actions were certainly very offensive from the first. He reached his hand across the table, seized my cards, and turned them with their faces upward, so that all could see. I did not, at the moment, resent the insolent, ungentlemanly action, because my own most unfortunate mistake gave some color of justice to his conduct. I was ready to explain, but he gave me no chance. He struck a small hand-bell which was on the table near him, and a waiter appeared.

"Send the other waiters here; and the bar-keeper; and the porter. Gentlemen," he said, addressing the other players, speaking in a low, soft, well-modulated voice, "I feel that some apology is due you. I should not have allowed this black-leg—this pettifogging thief—to be of our little party to-night. I did not

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know he was a thief, but I am compelled to admit that I have long suspected it. I am not apologizing to you, understand, because he is a liar, a rascal, a pettifogger in what he calls his profession. That knowledge is common property. The boys on the street know it; the Greasers down in the valley know it; the Chinamen in Hop Alley know it. But I did not know he would steal; I only suspected it. Therefore please accept my apologies that I did not communicate my suspicions to you."

There was more, very much more, to the same purpose. When the employes came, he pointed a finger at me and said:

"You fellows, that is a man who calls himself Carmichael—Michael Carmichael. Take a good look at him. If he darkens these doors again, by day or by night, throw him out. Remember what I say. If ever he shows himself here and does not go out, you go out. Now go back to your work, please."

No man can hope to succeed in my noble and arduous profession who is not quick to perceive and to grasp all the possibilities of difficult and delicate situations. In the twinkling of an eye, as it were, I saw very clearly that these words must be a prelude to a deadly personal encounter. Mr. Smith had carefully chosen his words with no other end in view. I perceived also that, inasmuch as all men went armed

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there, if I should attempt to draw my revolver, the whole issue would be resolved into a question of quickness in the use of fire-arms. In that case, the chances would be about even.

Also, I saw the money on the table. A certain portion of it was now rightfully mine. In all the emergencies of life, the one thing not to be despised is money. With perfect self-possession, laughing the while, I reached out my hand to the little heap of cash on the table. Swiftly and accurately I separated it into four equal parts, each representing the share of the player who had placed it there.

I do not know why I laugh when I am angry. On this occasion there was not much in the words, flowing so smoothly from the lips of Smith, to excite mirth. Nevertheless I was laughing—and I was angry; and the laugh was accompanied by a sort of spasmodic twitching of the muscles of the face, and there was a queer feeling of compression about the neck and jaws. In Gopher City the weapon in common use was the revolver of heavy caliber; but I had long held to the theory that, in close personal encounters, the old-fashioned bowie-knife is not to be despised. Hence, while in that country, I always carried a knife of the kind, in a sheath, inside my coat, near the collar. While all men could see I had revolvers, nobody knew I had this knife.

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No one interfered while I divided the money. I suppose the players comprehended that my motives, as to the money, were honest. I suppose, moreover, my laughing anger was mistaken by them for genuine mirth—or for an attempt to counterfeit it. I think Smith did not understand it, for, though he never took his eyes from my face, he was not as well on his guard as a man should be who uses that kind of language to a fellow mortal.

It must not be supposed that I had formed any plan, in advance of my act, as to how I should resent all these insults. It was only when I thrust my share of the money into the inside breast pocket of my coat, touching the handle of my knife as I did so, that I remembered that weapon. Involuntarily my hand closed around the hilt. I drew the knife from the sheath, placing my left hand upon the table as I did so. Even while the last words of Smith's offensive tirade were trembling upon his lips, I struck. I think the blade entered just above his collar-bone. He clutched at the weapon, turned half round in his chair, and fell, face downward, upon the floor. As far as I know, he never spoke again.

Peace to his ashes! His conduct in this affair was most ungentlemanly, and his words were unjust and cruel; but if my forgiveness can follow him to the

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place where he has gone and do him any good there, he may have it with all my heart.

Now the moment my knife descended, I realized, as if by inspiration, that my career in Gopher City was at an end. Time, place and circumstances being well considered, my act was clearly one of self-defense. Yet I knew the fierce, lawless, savage-minded people of that town too well to believe they would listen to any defense I could make. They would say I had tried to cheat the man; that I had been caught in the attempt; that I had then slain him in his own house. I knew well what my fate would be, if I allowed them to get their ruthless hands upon me.

Having no time to lose, I therefore lost none. I pushed the table over and leaped across it, flourishing my knife as I did so. As a rule people are timid about approaching a desperate man armed with a knife. The man most to be dreaded, at that moment, was the marshal. His office was no sinecure, certainly; if he had not been something of a fighter he could not have held his place twenty-four hours. It was well for me I did not forget his presence at that moment. When he reached out his hand, as I leaped forward and cleared the table and the body of my fallen foe, and caught my coat where it hung loosely under my arm, I was not unprepared. I thrust my knife through his arm near the shoulder, and he sud-

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denly let go. My first rush carried me beyond the group of waiters, who perhaps were not armed. I then faced about, changed my knife from my right hand to my left, and drew my revolver. I was wise enough not to keep my back to the crowd in my attempt to gain the street. I had little hope of leaving the place alive, and but for that fortunate knife thrust through the marshal's arm, I am sure I should have been murdered then and there. Even as I turned, I saw the officer's left hand go toward his belt, and there was the glint of polished metal as the weapon came from its holster.

If I were disposed to boast of such vain and worldly matters, I might here take some credit for coolness, nerve, presence of mind, and skill in the use of firearms. I could have shot the marshal, I am sure, or one of the others; but that would have been of small service to me under the circumstances. I raised my pistol and fired at the chandelier. The bullet struck the bronze stem of it near the place where the iron hook from the ceiling passed through it. The stem broke like glass, and the twelve kerosene lamps came down with a crash to the floor. I took advantage of the momentary darkness which followed and gained the street. Then I saw a great light inside the building, and I heard voices shouting, "Fire!"

I was not slow to perceive that the burning of that

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sink of iniquity might prove a blessing to me. It would be natural for those inside to try to extinguish the fire, and so their attention would be diverted from me for some time. The stairway leading to my rooms was only a few feet away from the door by which I had gained the street. I went at once to my bedroom. I took my ready money—about twenty-five hundred dollars—and thrust it into my pockets. I filled my belt with cartridges, strapped two blankets together, took my mackintosh, and hurried out into the hall. A back stair led to a yard in the rear of the premises; and the yard had a gate which opened upon an alley. As I went down this stairway I heard a great noise of shouting, a sound of breaking glass, and other noises incident to fires. Smoke was coming up through the crevices in the flooring. The place was certainly doomed, and with it the entire block of buildings where it stood. I felt encouraged, because I believed the conflagration would give all the people ample employment, for a few hours, at least.

At one end of the alley were half a dozen small stables, and in one of them my horse was hitched. As I made my way in that direction I met many people running down the alley toward the fire; but I had nothing to fear from them, since they could not possibly know what had happened. But when I got to the stable I was astonished to find my horse ready,

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saddled and bridled, and a man, mounted upon another horse, holding the reins. By the light of the moon I recognized this man. It was Gilbert; of him I shall have more to say presently. My first impulse was to shoot him, for, without my horse, I could not hope to escape; but, before I could move or speak, he said:

“Mount, Mr. Carmichael—mount and get out of this, if you value your neck. No, don’t stop to ask questions. If you save your neck this night, I will explain; if you do not, you will not need an explanation. Mount, my son, mount and ride, if you would live to open another jack-pot.”

Under other circumstances, I might have resented this rather insolent speech, but this was no time to make new enemies. I was in the saddle before he had finished.

“If you do not know where to go, or how to get there, you had better let me conduct this excursion,” he said.

I made no reply, but followed him through the alley into the street. The roadway was empty, but the walks on either side were thronged with people. As we turned to ride up the street a bright light broke out above the block. A cloud of smoke rolled over the roofs of the buildings, and sparks and blazing fragments of shingles began to fall. Here and there, all

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about the town, roofs of houses stood out distinctly in the blood-red light of the conflagration. It was clear to me, the people of Gopher City would have plenty of occupation for their minds and hands for some time. In fact, as I have since learned, three whole blocks of that modern Sodom were laid in ashes that morning, including, of course, the Rock Crystal saloon.

I was about to put spurs to my horse, when my companion said:

“Gently, gently. The good people might begin to wonder why a couple of horsemen ride, at break-neck speed, from a sight so attractive to most men as a fire. Wait. It would surely be a pity to have to hurt any more of your fellow citizens this morning. We will ride faster by and by.”

We rode at a walk, taking the most unfrequented streets, until we reached the eastern limit of the town. Gopher City is in a sort of depression, rimmed by low prairie hills. From the top of the rim the ground stretches away, in gentle undulations, to the horizon. From the place where we reached this ridge the trail leads off to the southeast. We halted and looked back. The fire was raging like a volcano. The rising wind swept the smoke away to the north. Down in the streets it was as light as day. The waters of the little river which flows through the town looked like

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blood; the sky, the houses, the hills beyond, were all tinged with the same crimson hue. I wish I could erase that awful picture from the tablets of my memory. All at once, as we sat there, looking down upon that scene of ruin, my companion said:

“Look!”

And he pointed with his hand toward a part of the town which was at least a quarter of a mile south of the place where the fire raged. I looked and saw, beyond the bridge which spans the river near the southern edge of the city, a large livery stable. Hostlers were leading horses from this stable, and, as soon as a horse was led out, one of a group of men near the door would mount it. I observed also that, here and there, in the streets, mounted men, singly or in groups, were riding toward the stable.

“Do you understand?” said my companion.

I understood: The “vigilantes” were gathering. This organization, called into being by the need of better protection of life and property than the law could give, was composed of some of the best men of the community. Among its members were veteran frontiersmen and old soldiers of both armies of the Civil war. There were men who had scouted for Custer, men who had ridden with Sheridan, and Shelby, and Morgan. Their commander was a grim old veteran who had been colonel of a cavalry regiment in

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the great war. Their organization was perfect and so was their discipline. I had overestimated the power of the fire as a demoralizing agent. These men had seen a fire or two already.

"The Vigilance Committee," I gasped.

"Exactly so. Does it occur to you that it is time to be jogging?"

"For me, yes. But as you had no hand in this business, why get yourself into trouble?"

"We will speak of that some other time."

At that moment a column of twenty men, as nearly as we could guess their number, rode across the bridge and turned into one of the streets which led in our direction. They could be at no loss to know the way we had taken, for half of the people we had met on the streets knew me well. We looked in the direction of the trail. Not a tree or bush, in all the wide plain, to offer even a moment's concealment. Day was even then beginning to break, and therefore we must soon be in plain view of those who were after us. It seemed that the issue must resolve itself into one of speed and endurance. We had good horses, which was a point in our favor, since at least half of our pursuers were riding common livery hacks. Yet some of the vigilantes rode their own horses; and some of them were sure to be well mounted. We might assume that, of ten of their best animals, five would be as good as

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ours and one or two even better. As they were all armed with long-range, breech-loading rifles, while we had only revolvers, they might easily shoot us down, keeping, at the same time, safely out of range of our weapons. The outlook was not cheerful.

The trail, as I have said, stretched away to the southeast. I started in that direction, but my friend said:

“Not that way, Mr. Carmichael. We must make for the Kingdom.”

We turned and rode northeast. There was no trail. The prairie had been burned over, some months before, and now it was covered with young grass, crisp and short.

“Not too fast,” said Gilbert. “Save your horse as much as you can. It is twenty miles to the Kingdom.”

MAKING FOR THE KINGDOM.

CHAPTER II.

MAKING FOR THE KINGDOM.

What was the "Kingdom?" Who was Gilbert? I will try to answer these questions in the order in which I have stated them.

The region known to us as "The Kingdom," is one of the strangest places on the globe, I think. Twenty miles to the northeast of Gopher City there rises above the level of the surrounding country what seems, as viewed from the plain, a long, irregular wall of yellow mud. It appears to be about two hundred feet high and extends from northwest to southeast for several hundred miles. The first sight of it suggests to the beholder a tremendous earthwork thrown up by some race of giants in some prehistoric age. The face of it is irregular, with curves and projections, which may have been bays and promontories of an ancient sea coast. The outer slopes are strangely scarred and wrinkled, where the rains have trenched them. Some of these clay cliffs, as seen from the prairie, have strange fantastic shapes, suggestive of the pictures of extinct marine monsters one sees in books on geology. It is as if some old-world reptiles had crawled out of the ocean, now represented by the prairie, and had

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curled themselves up on the shore to die. The winds and rains have so worn the hill-sides as to carve out, upon the side and summits, protuberances which might be fins, legs, claws and enormous jaws. Similar formations may be observed in the clay bluffs along the Missouri river in Northwest Missouri. Behind this outer wall there is a region hard to describe. Imagine that, one day, while the earth was yet soft from the great deluge, some titanic infant attempted a mud-pie; that he first piled up on the plain a mass of yellow mud two hundred miles long, seventy miles wide, and two hundred feet high; that, before leaving it to dry in the sun, he took a knife and slashed it across and across, in every possible direction, from top to bottom—the knife being about two hundred yards thick at the edge and half a mile across at the back. Whoever can picture a mud pie of that size, so slashed across in every direction, will have some idea of what I may call the ground plan of the region known as “The Kingdom.” The knife had generally spared the outer rim of the pie, so that it was not cut through in more than half a dozen places throughout its entire length. But the network of gullies and streams inside would form a maze compared with which the famous labyrinth of King Minos must have been a very simple affair. Each clay hill is so like all the other hills or mounds, each gully is so like all other gullies, each

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yellow-hued, sluggish stream which meanders through it, is so like all the others, that whosoever enters the region without a guide or without a compass may congratulate himself if he ever gets out alive. From the summit of one of its cliffs the land, as far as the eye can see, appears to be a vast table-land, crossed by innumerable ditches. Not a single hill rises above the general level to serve as a landmark to the bewildered traveler. There is, however, a general dip of the whole region toward the southwest, for several streams—two at least—flow through it in that direction.

Why is it called "The Kingdom?" Because, although the Federal and Territorial governments have jurisdiction over it, their authority is merely nominal. It is the ideal hiding place in all creation, a haven of refuge for all sorts of fugitives from justice. Horse thieves, counterfeiters, murderers and escaped convicts flee to it when the surrounding country gets too hot for them. Occasionally, as in my case, it might become a shelter for wronged, hunted, persecuted victims of circumstance, but for the most part its inmates were bad men. Sheriffs and United States marshals never visited it except in such numbers as to defeat, usually, the purpose for which they went. Being thus a country whose people were beyond the pale of government, it was said to be a kingdom by itself—hence,

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in time, it was called "The Kingdom." The reader will readily understand why we were so anxious to reach this place.

Now, as to Gilbert. About a week before the unfortunate affair I have described, a stranger appeared among the frequenters of the Rock Crystal saloon. Certainly, strangers were not rare in Gopher City, at that time, but this man attracted attention by certain peculiarities of manner. For instance, he drank nothing but very light beverages, and he partook of them sparingly. He did not patronize the card tables at all, but confined himself to billiards when he wished to amuse himself. He did not seem to know anybody, nor did he appear at all anxious to enjoy the friendship and society of the patrons of the place. Inasmuch as we, within certain decorous limits, were a sociable people, this conduct was considered strange and was the subject of much quiet discussion.

For opinions differed. Some held that he was a professional gambler, "sizing up the crowd," "laying for something big." The advocates of this doctrine called attention to the superior quality of the stranger's clothes, the whiteness of his hands, and his "tired" manner. They held that these characteristics, in the absence of proof to the contrary, created an overwhelming presumption in favor of the truth of their contention. Yet there were some who thought he

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might be a doctor, or dentist, or barber, studying Gopher City, with a view to coming there to live. There were others who declared he must be a preacher or temperance lecturer. They argued that as Gopher City was what the missionaries call a "great destitute field," it was only natural to expect the advent of a preacher at any moment. As there was nothing to be urged in favor of this theory, except the personal appearance of the man, and as the advocates of the gambling theory had exactly the same argument on their side, the missionary contention had to be abandoned at last, even by its most confident supporters.

It was not easy to guess the man's age. He might be anywhere between thirty and forty-five. He wore no beard, not even a moustache. He had black hair, and large gray eyes, a large mouth, a long nose, and beautiful teeth. His voice was soft, and his smile was remarkably sweet and winning. His hands were long and white, with long, tapering fingers. He had the appearance of a man who had inherited consumption.

He was in the room at the time of my encounter with Smith. I made a mental note, that evening, of the fact that he was, with one exception, the best dressed man in the place. I need not name the exception. He wore, as I well remember, a black frock coat, black pantaloons and white waistcoat.

This was the noted John R. Gilbert. My attention

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had early been drawn to him by an incident which I might have forgotten, had not subsequent events given me good cause to remember it. The first time he appeared at the Rock Crystal, we met, face to face, near the entrance. I thought he was about to accost me. He stared at me with a surprised look—the look of a man who unexpectedly meets an old acquaintance. Either because he saw no answering look of recognition on my face, or because he discovered his mistake, he turned away without speaking. I observed that he watched me closely all that evening. Once he came to the table where I was playing, and asked permission to watch the game. I do not think he noticed much what was going on; but I know he stared at me most of the time. Next day I discovered he had been questioning the janitor of the building. He wished to know how long I had been in Gopher City, and he seemed much surprised to learn that I had been there more than two years. The janitor heard him mutter to himself, “Well—well—well!” Often after that first evening I caught him staring at me, but he never spoke to me. Sometimes he would come into the court room, and he always appeared to watch the cases in which I was concerned with great interest. Several times I discovered that he was listening to conversations in which I was engaged; but this was not, of itself, surprising, because I have always been

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considered a good talker. I wish to say here, all reports to the contrary notwithstanding, that the first time he ever spoke to me was there in the alley, on the night of the burning of the Rock Crystal saloon. That was the beginning of my acquaintance with John Russell Gilbert. The acquaintance had an unfavorable beginning, and, but for the mercy of God, would have had an ending even more sinister.

* * * * *

The moonlight paled before the increasing light of the dawn as we swiftly and steadily galloped over the plain. Long before the sun rose, the landscape was as clearly visible as it would be at noon. Not a cloud was in the sky. Meadow larks were singing all about us; the air was musical with the soft, cooing noise made by the prairie chickens. Millions of flowers, prairie pinks, wild strawberry blooms, violets—and thousands of others—dotted the rolling green. Around the horizon, the inevitable thin, blue haze of the prairie landscape in summer—like the last stroke of the master's brush—added the finishing touch to the wonderful picture which, once seen, is never forgotten. Yes, it was very, very lovely; but I could not forget that the tigerish hearts of my enemies could not be charmed by the beauty of this fair morning world. Their cruel purpose could not be softened by the fragrant summer blossoms or the perfumed south wind pouring in

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fragrant torrents across this wide free plain. They were cold, hard, commonplace men, who could not be expected to possess a tithe of my own susceptibility to such influences. The beautiful day now breaking over the world might be the last of earthly days for me. I might hope to see the sun rise, but heaven only could know if I should see it set. The thought was full of bitterness.

Often, as the light increased, we looked back toward the place where we had left the road. We had some hope that, when our enemies reached that point, there would not be light enough to enable them to discover where we left the beaten track, in which case they might go along the highway far enough to give us a safe start. Unfortunately, they knew all about the Kingdom, and guessed from the start, I suppose, that we would try to go there. They must therefore have been on the lookout for our trail. When they found it, it was not hard for those experienced plainsmen to follow it through the young grass. Thus they had the advantage of knowing our movements from the start, while we, for a time, were in doubt as to theirs. The prairie was of the kind usually described as rolling. That is to say, there was a series of hills of which the slopes were long while the elevations were not great. Thus it might happen that when we were at the top of one swell, our pursuers might be

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at the bottom of another, and so be invisible to us. We dared not lose the time necessary to make sure they were upon our track.

The sun rose almost in our faces. As the great flood of golden light deluged the world, turning the dew-drops into diamonds, an involuntary exclamation of pleasure broke from my lips in spite of the care which lay heavy upon my heart. I am keenly susceptible to religious influences and am therefore deeply poetical by nature. I spoke of the beauty of the scene. Gilbert did not immediately reply, but turned in his saddle and looked back along the way we had come. We were not far from the summit of one of the ridges I have described. When we reached its highest point Gilbert exclaimed:

“Hold up!”

I halted and looked back. Away in the southwest a dark column of smoke rose straight toward the sky, marking the scene of the morning's tragedy—grimly suggestive of the reasons why we were abroad on that fairest of June mornings. My companion stretched out one long arm in the direction of the smoke, and said:

“You appear to have a fine eye for scenic effects. Look now, at the top of that long, green hill—there, right in line with the smoke. It seems to me there is something which should quicken a poet's pulse.”

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He was exactly the kind of man, as I was to learn, who was sure to be frivolous in the use of words when he had most cause to be serious. I looked where he pointed, and saw that our foes were coming across that ridge in a long, irregular procession, the first seven or eight being well together, the rest straggling along, in groups of two or three, behind the leaders.

We turned and resumed our flight, my companion being apparently as unconcerned as if he were merely out for the morning air. From the summit of the next ridge I saw, beneath the rim of the rising sun, a dark blue line, which extended along the horizon from northeast to southeast.

"The Kingdom," exclaimed Gilbert. "We are in sight of the promised land!" Then, after a moment's pause, he added, "But so was Moses."

The allusion to Moses may have been appropriate, under the circumstances, but I am not sure that it was in good taste, or that it was uttered in the most reverent spirit.

Incredible as it may appear, he, then and there, riding at a gallop, with bloodthirsty enemies hot upon his trail, began to question me as to my religious predilections, declaring his own preference for the Regular Baptists, remarking that while not, as yet, called effectually, he had no doubt of his election. Seeing, I suppose, that I was not, at that time, deeply interested

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in the issues between Calvinism and Arminianism, he changed the topic and began to discuss our present chances as coolly as if he were not at all interested in the outcome.

"It is a simple matter of mental arithmetic," he said. "Allow so much for the start we have, so much for our present rate of speed and theirs, and you get exactly how much they will have to gain without killing their horses. Allow for the distance we have to travel, and the distance they have to travel, to gain the "Kingdom," and you have our chances, to the fraction of a cent."

I looked back as well as I could without checking my horse. The pursuers were crossing another ridge. Evidently some of their horses were falling behind, but five or six of them were well together in front.

"The fraction must be a small one," I said despondently, "which represents the value of our lives."

Gilbert took a more cheerful view. He proceeded to prove, by I know not what process of reasoning, that we must gain the pass to the Kingdom, just four hundred yards in advance of our enemies. When I called his attention to the fact that his calculations were based upon several assumptions none of which might be true, he replied that he was not without personal experience of such matters, having more than once been in the position of hunter or hunted. His

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conclusions were very comforting, and I told him so.

"They would be highly comforting," he said, "but for one unfortunate circumstance. Some of those fellows back yonder carry guns sighted to kill at one thousand yards."

"Great Scott!" I exclaimed. "What shall we do?"

"'Escape for thy life,' " he said; "'look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain; escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed!' On second thought, you may look behind you, but all the rest of that scripture applies strictly."

We rode on for a long time in silence. At last we could no longer doubt that our enemies were gaining. That is to say, about five of them had managed to lessen the distance between us very greatly. Of these, one soon gave up the chase—of which fact we had singular, and, to me, disagreeable, proof. I shall never forget the incident. As I looked at a small ant hill about forty yards ahead of me, a small puff of dust rose from it and a few seconds later I heard the report of a gun from the direction of our enemies.

"That must be a Springfield rifle," said Gilbert, "warranted to kill—fortunately not warranted to hit—at one thousand yards. Not a bad shot, however, as that bullet must have passed directly over your head; but it means that one more man finds himself out of the race."

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He was right, for, when I looked back, I saw that one of the leaders had stopped. While I looked there was a puff of smoke and, a second later, another report. Then and there I seemed to hear a voice saying, in thunder tones, "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish!" I date the beginning of the work of grace in me from that moment.

Gilbert's arithmetic was certainly very good. If his heart had been as sound as his mathematics, it would have been better for him and for others. When we were within one hundred yards of the bluffs, two of our foes were not more than four hundred yards behind us. The great yellow cliffs were right before us, their wrinkled fronts covered with stiff, wiry grass which looked like coarse gray hair. We could see the place where the yellow waters of Saffron creek found their way to the plain. The gap was not visible, because it does not open at right angles with the face of the bluff, the stream flowing almost parallel with the outer face of the cliffs after it passes through to the plain. When the two men nearest us perceived that we must beat them to the pass, they opened fire with the repeating rifles they carried. Although four hundred yards might be considered long range for their guns, especially as they hardly checked the speed of their horses, we were in considerable danger. I could see where some of the bullets struck the hill

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before us and I thought the range was fairly good. We leaned forward over our horses' necks, to make ourselves as small as possible, and rode as fast as our tired horses could go. Owing to the angle at which the pass opened, we should be entirely safe from bullets the moment we entered it.

Here a thing happened which goes to show that the calculations of men, however carefully made beforehand, are apt to become complicated with accidents which no human wisdom can foresee. A man, a member of the Vigilantes, had been on guard at this pass for several days, to capture some notorious offender who was expected to come down from the "Kingdom." I suppose he heard the firing, discovered that his friends were after us, and determined to help them. He must have known that two men in desperate flight for their lives could not easily be stopped by one man, but I suppose he counted a little on the surprise, and a little on what is called "the drop." Partly in order to escape the bullets of his friends, and partly for the purpose of surprising us, he had posted himself just within the mouth of the pass. There the track was about ten feet wide, with the inner wall of the cliff on one side and the creek on the other. He placed himself directly across the road, with his horse's head toward the stream, so that his right hand, armed with a revolver, was on the

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side of our approach. It would have been better generalship, on his part, if he had retired a little further up the gorge; for, coming, as we did, at full speed around the angle of the cliff, we could not have avoided a collision with him, if we had tried. I was a little ahead of Gilbert. The man raised his hand, there was a flash, and I felt the sting of powder on my face. A moment later, I was lying on the ground, my mouth full of dirt. Gilbert's horse was struggling to its feet, while my own was lying, with his neck doubled under him, at the edge of the water, fifteen feet below. I was dazed, bruised, terribly shaken, but, thank heaven, not seriously hurt. Gilbert did not appear to be hurt at all. Of the three horses mine was killed, the stranger's was disabled and could not rise, but Gilbert's was uninjured. My companion helped me to my feet and then bent over the vigilant, where he lay with one leg under his horse, and removed his cartridge belt, and the remaining pistol. He also picked up the revolver which the fellow had dropped, and tossed both weapons into the creek. There was a repeating rifle slung to the stranger's saddle. Gilbert kept the rifle. By this time I had mounted Gilbert's horse, as he bade me. He then came and caught hold of the stirrup leather, crying:

“Ride! Make for the next turn in the gully!”

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It was time, for I could hear the clatter of hoofs as our pursuers rode up to the mouth of the pass.

It seemed rather inhuman to leave that poor man there without trying to help him, as he begged us to do, but we had no time to waste. Yet even this may have been providential, for the two ruffians who had been shooting at us rode over him, in their headlong eagerness. We saw the catastrophe from the safe shelter of the turn of the ravine. At first there was such a cloud of dust we could not make out exactly what had happened. Evidently both horsemen were down, but we could not tell whether either of them was hurt. I saw all four feet of one horse in the air; as for the other, he may have followed mine to the river, with his rider along with him. At least, there could not be much danger from either of them now, though we did not choose to wait longer. Gilbert took the horse by the bridle, and started up one of the lateral ravines. The only comment he saw proper to make was to quote something which ran, as well as I remember, like this:

“It seems a shame,” the walrus said,
“To play them such a trick,
After we’ve brought them out so far
And made them trot so quick!”

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CHAPTER III.

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It was fortunate for us that Gilbert, having some previous knowledge of the place, had provided himself with a pocket compass, otherwise we must, sooner or later, have become food for coyotes in that hideous wilderness. As it was, we were not very well equipped for the journey of seventy-five miles to the other side. My blankets were with my horse at the mouth of the pass, but Gilbert gave me one of the two he had brought with him. We had nothing else to carry except our arms and ammunition. As to provisions we were absolutely destitute. We might hope to kill a rabbit now and then, or even a quail or prairie chicken, and as Gilbert had some matches, we could cook what we killed, if we could obtain any fuel; whatever we cooked must be eaten without salt.

It was yet early in the forenoon when we resumed our journey. In a little hollow where there was water and grass we unsaddled the horse and left him, because he would be an encumbrance rather than a help on the road we had to travel. Setting our course by compass, we found that our line of march would take us directly up a steep bluff before us. The top of the

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hill was, I think, about one hundred and fifty feet higher than the bottom. Up there the ground was level, covered with the short, wiry grass I have mentioned. It was very good walking, but at the far side of the little plateau the face of the hill was as steep as the wall of a house. We made a circuit of the summit, to find that the only place we could descend was the place where we came up. We had to go around the hill by means of the encircling ravines. I describe this first experience in order to give some idea of the difficulties of this most wretched journey.

I suppose we made about ten miles of actual progress that day, although we must have walked, altogether, more than twice that distance. That afternoon Gilbert shot a rabbit and a prairie hen. He was certainly remarkably skillful in the use of fire-arms, for, although our weapons were not adapted to the killing of small game, I never saw him miss a shot in the whole course of the journey.

About the middle of the afternoon there were signs of a change in the weather. The breeze had died away and the heat was oppressive. At four o'clock a great cloud appeared in the West and we heard, from time to time, a far-off, sullen growl of thunder. We were descending into a little, narrow valley at the bottom of which there was a small stream fringed with bushes and stunted trees. Half way to the bottom of the

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slope we were surprised to come upon a dim foot-path, which led down to the stream. It came from our left, along a sort of natural terrace on the side of the hill. We had reached it just at the place where it turned down toward the creek.

"It has not been used lately," I said, as we stood and examined it.

"No," said my companion, "let us hope not. Let us hope that the people who made it are now making tracks in some other place. I am a sociable man myself, but I do not believe the fellows who made this road would be desirable company, under any circumstances. Let us explore a little."

We followed the path to the left and had not to go far to find the end of it. It terminated at a small level place, something like what miners call a "dump." The clay of this platform was trodden hard and there were ashes on it, and bits or charred wood, where a fire had been. The side of the hill was here perpendicular, and in the face of it was an excavation which, in form and size, looked like the door of a house. To the right of this was another opening, evidently intended for a window. The door had no shutter, the window no sash. Gilbert went to the window and looked in.

"Nobody at home," he said, "let us enter."

A room about twelve feet square had been neatly excavated in the side of the hill. We found nothing

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in the place except a small heap of firewood and an old bucket fallen to pieces. The room was dry and must have afforded a very good shelter to the people who made it. As we had no way to bring water from the stream we had to go there to dress our game. We cooked it on the platform before the door, using the wood we found inside. We had the rabbit for supper, but we cooked the prairie hen at the same time, partly to save fuel and partly to keep it from spoiling. The rabbit was dry and tough, and we had no salt, but we made a very good meal, being both tired and hungry.

All this time the clouds in the West had been steadily climbing toward the zenith. While we were eating our supper we heard a sound like the trampling of innumerable horses coming on at a swift gallop. Then a large hailstone struck the slope above us and came bounding into the fire. This was a hint not to be disregarded, and we immediately took shelter in the excavation. A moment later the ground was white, the fire was beaten out, while hailstones poured along the side of the hill like grain down the chute of an elevator. Then came a tremendous storm of rain, driven in horizontal sheets before a hurricane of wind from the southwest. It was well for us that our shelter was in the eastern face of the hill, otherwise the place must have been deluged with water through the door and



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window; as it was, not a drop reached us. The wind soon ceased to blow, but the lightning blazed, the thunder boomed, and the rain fell in torrents until far into the night. Although the storm began at least an hour and a half before sunset, it soon grew dark in our cave. We made ourselves as comfortable as we could, spreading our blankets on the floor and using our coats for pillows.

While the wind blew hard it was not possible to converse, so great was the uproar, but as soon as it ceased my companion addressed himself to the task of entertaining me—according to his peculiar ideas of entertainment. With the exception of Mr. Richard Swiveler, I have never heard of any man who could quote as many odds and ends of poetry as Gilbert. But Swiveler, be it remembered, was a character in a novel, a figment of a novelist's imagination, and, so far as I remember, nothing he ever said, or sung, or quoted had the diabolical appositeness, so to speak, that characterized Gilbert's efforts in the same direction.

He began the evening's entertainment by singing the mournful sea ballad, "The Bay of Biscay, O!" Then he quoted some lines about a lost lamb:

"Storm upon the mountain,
Rainy torrents beating,
And the little snow-white lamb, bleating, ever bleating."

And he recited it well, as far as that goes. He ap-

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peared to think so, at least, for he said, when he had finished:

"I say, Michael—I may call you Michael? That is fine, is it not, that little poem? And it seems to fit our case. Snorting old storm—thunder and lightning—'rainy torrents beating'—two lost lambs astray in the mountains—literally and figuratively astray—not exactly snow-white, of course, but not the less in need of a shepherd, eh? By the way, are you sleepy?"

"No," I said, "I feel as if I should never sleep again."

"I dare say. 'Macbeth doth murder'—and so on. Is this your first man?"

"I do not understand you," I said.

"I ask if this is the first time you ever carved a gentleman over the clavicle with a bowie knife. Have you ever before to-day, in that or in any other way, sent a fellow citizen to try the realities of the unseen world—as we say at prayer meeting?"

"No, no, no!" I said. "Never before, so help me, and I hope with all my soul it may never happen to me again."

"I bet that you do. Do you know, I have never seen a man who did not feel that way, under similar circumstances. It is always that way with the first man—almost as bad with the second. I remember—but

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never mind—there was something I wanted to ask you—O yes. Do you believe in a personal devil?”

“I do not know,” I groaned. “I have heard his existence denied.”

“So have I,” he said.

Then he began to relate a horrible story which he said he had got from a celebrated evangelist, who had got it from the man who saw it. It was the most horrible story I ever heard, with the devil as a principal character. It lost nothing from his manner of telling it. He concluded by saying, that before he had heard this tale he had been a doubter of Satan's personality, but that story had made him a firm believer.

I made a desperate effort to change the subject, by congratulating him upon his marksmanship as exhibited that day in the killing of the rabbit and prairie hen. It was a long time before he made any reply—so long that I began to hope he had fallen asleep. At last he said:

“In Byron's poem, when somebody congratulated Mazeppa upon his horsemanship, he said:

‘——ill betide,

The school in which I learned to ride.’

Though I never could understand how he learned to ride by being tied to the back of a broncho, it would have been worth something if he had learned how to fall off, under the circumstances—worth bragging

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about, anyhow. Certainly he married a Tartar princess—married a whole ranchful of mustangs, you might say, and so had to learn to ride or get no good of his wife's property. Anyway, I will parody his speech and say, "I'll betide the school wherein I learned to shoot."

Then he told me the story of his life—or what purported to be the story of his life, for, as will be seen, he must have omitted some details concerning himself and his family. He was born in North Missouri. His parents had come into that state from Kentucky. They were religious people—Baptists, of the straightest Calvinistic tenets, cleanly in life, courteous of manner, rigidly honest in all dealings with their neighbors. They had given their son the best educational advantages the country afforded at the time. The father died just before the breaking out of the Civil war, leaving his estate to the mother.

The sympathies of the Gilberts were with the South, when the troubles began. The young man wished to join the army, but was persuaded to remain at home and help his mother in the management of the farm. The local conditions, in the vicinity of his home, were certainly far from agreeable to people of his political views; yet, although he had taken no pains to conceal his sentiments, he was never molested in any way, until late in the summer of the second

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year of the great struggle. About that time one of their neighbors, a soldier in General Price's army, returned home secretly, on recruiting service. This man was reasonably cautious while in the neighborhood, visiting his friends, or the friends of his cause, only in the night. Nevertheless his mission was full of peril, for the people in that county were almost evenly divided on the question of secession; party spirit ran high, and the passions of both factions were becoming more and more inflamed by mutual injuries and insults. It may well be supposed that there was no lack of people in that part of the country who would have been glad to turn this man over to the provost marshal. I give the rest of the story in Gilbert's own words, as I recall them:

"On our place was a renter named Langly. This man had been a special favorite of my father, heaven knows why. My father furnished him teams and farming implements, loaned him money to buy provisions for his family, helped him to clothe his children—in fact, he had helped him to such effect that, when the war began, Langly had quite a start in the world.

"He wore what the boys used to call a 'billy-goat' beard. That is to say, he allowed the hair to grow on his neck and under his chin, but not on his face. You have seen pictures of the sun-god of the Aztecs, I suppose—a head with rays of light standing out all

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around it, like 'quills upon the fretful porcupine?' Langly, with his stiff, red hair standing up from his forehead and about his temples, his coarse beard streaming out from around his jaws and under his chin, was not unlike that ancient Mexican deity in appearance. He was 'loyal.' I have never heard any man use the word 'loyal' in such a mouth-filling, soul-satisfying way as Langly, and I used to hear it often in those days. He had two sons and an only daughter. The sons were in the militia at Richmond, and the daughter was at home. She weighed about two hundred pounds, rather more than less. She had a very strong, shrill, high-keyed voice, and whenever she passed our house she used to stop in the road before the gate and sing:

'The Union forever,
Hurrah boys, hurrah!
Down with the traitors,
And up with the stars!
Fur we'll rally round the flag, boys
We'll rally round the flag,
Shou-ting the battle cry of Freedom.'

"She used to wear, on the ample bosom of her dress, a small tin ornament whereon was painted the American flag. Below the flag was a scroll bearing the word "Lincoln." To this day I never hear the word 'loyal' without recalling Langly's whiskers. I never

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see the flag of my country without thinking of that young woman and her badge. Long since I have come to respect the memory of Abraham Lincoln; and I wish, O how I wish I could recall his honored name without recalling, at the same time, that tin thing on the bosom of that fat girl's dress. Such and so potent is the association of ideas. If I had been provost marshal of that district, I should have upheld the dignity of my cause and the glory of my flag by suppressing Langly and his girl.

"Langly discovered, in some way, the presence of that Confederate soldier in the neighborhood. One night, while the man was at our place, a company of militia, led by one of Langly's sons, and accompanied by Langly himself, burst in upon us.

"It is not for me to say how far the genius of Columbia rejoiced at the spectacle of this patriot sacrificing the home of his benefactor, as a whole burnt offering, on the country's altar. I am sure, my poor old mother never in all her gentle life heard the sin of rebellion set forth in such peculiar language as Langly adopted for that purpose on that occasion. As a Bible reader she knew perhaps how Samuel the prophet had likened the sin of rebellion unto that of witchcraft, but Samuel had confined himself to a mere statement of the facts, without embellishment. Langly had greater liberty of speech.

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“My mother pleaded for her home, poor soul, not realizing at first that her home was likely to be only a part of her loss. They bound my hands behind my back, and they did like office for my friend, the Confederate soldier. We had a convenient tree in the door-yard, a large, beautiful tree, with long, arching branches. They put ropes about our necks, casting the loose ends over suitable limbs. As my feet left the earth, fire burst through the roof of my childhood’s home, and I heard my mother scream as she struggled to come to me. It was the last accent of her voice I was ever to hear this side of the grave.

“My next knowledge of things terrestrial was finding myself stretched upon the grass in the yard. The house was a heap of coals; my mother lay dead a few feet away; somebody had folded her hands across her breast and covered her face with a napkin. When my enemies hung me, they did not wait to see the end of their work, but rode away upon some other errand in the country’s service, leaving one of their number on guard. This man was an old neighbor in whose breast patriotism had not quite curdled the milk of human kindness. He cut me down, as soon as his companions were gone, and helped me back to life. As to my mother, she was dead; her heart had always been weak, and the excitement had been too much for her. The militiaman had not extended his

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sympathy to my companion in misfortune, who still hung swaying in the summer wind. The man who saved my life urged me to lose no time in getting away, for his sake as well as mine. I kissed my dead mother's lips and silently and reverently begged her forgiveness for every sorrow I had ever caused her. Then I took the rope which had done duty as hangman's halter, went out to the woods, found my own horse, mounted him and rode away south. Before I left, however, the militiaman promised to see that my mother was properly buried.

"No need to give the details of my journey south. In a little forest glade, near the Osage river, I found the man I sought. I will not say what man he was. His name was, and is, a name of terror—a name to conjure devils with. Of the bloody specters of that time, hereafter to be invoked by the pen of the historian and novelist, he will be the king of them all. I could give you some interesting details of my interview with him, but it grows late. The upshot of it was that I became a member of his band. Till the war ended I rode with him, and with those others, his lieutenants, whose names are only a little less terrible than his. I have killed more men than you have hairs in that nice, brown moustache of yours. I have been shot, starved, hunted like a wolf, expecting no mercy, asking none, granting none. I have taken

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ample vengeance for the gray hairs of my mother, knowing well that she would have been the first to say, 'Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord.' There came a day when we crossed to the north of the river and turned the heads of our horses westward. The "paw-paw" militia followed us, at a safe distance, yet not so joyfully, I think, as the crows and buzzards. Some of our men had adopted the Indian custom of scalping their enemies. I never practised the art but once, when I 'lifted' the hair of that distinguished patriot Langly. If ever you come to the place where I keep the cherished mementoes of my past, you shall see for yourself the color of his hair, and the quality of it.

"When the war ended, I was not included in the amnesty, neither I nor my companions. Therefore it was in order to take and slay us, and a great many people tried to do so. It was not easy to settle down into any honest calling,—but do not imagine I am trying to plead the injured innocent. That idea has been somewhat overworked in our case, as it seems to me. I am what I am from deliberate choice,—what the law calls a criminal, and the novel writers, sometimes, a gallant outlaw. I have a good education, like good literature, abhor strong drink and profanity, and I keep no low company—except in the way of business. I only make confidants of such people as I desire to attach to me for the immediate

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purposes I may have in view, and to them I confide only so much as suits me. And now, good-night to you."

And he rolled himself in his blanket and turned his face to the wall.

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CHAPTER IV.

BEULAH.

The events of the day were repeated, over and over again, in my dreams, mixing themselves up strangely with the events of Gilbert's narrative. It must have been long after midnight when my sleep became sound and dreamless. The morning sun, shining through the orifice designed for a window, waked me at last. I looked toward the place where my companion had slept; he was not there, but at that moment I heard a clear, sweet tenor voice singing:

So tender, so precious,
My Saviour to me;
So true and so gracious
I've found Him to be.
How can I but love Him?
But love Him, but love Him?
There's no friend above Him,
Poor sinner, for thee.

Was Gilbert the singer? I could hardly believe it. I got up and went outside. He had spitted the prairie-chicken on a stick, which now rested on two forked willow boughs, over a bed of coals. His coat and waistcoat hung upon some brushwood; the rifle he had taken from the vigilant leaned against the side of

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the hill; a belt, supporting two revolvers and a shining array of brass cartridges, was buckled about his waist. He had been to the brook for a bath, and he now stood with his face toward the opposite hill, combing his long, blue-black hair with a pocket comb. From this vocalist, so surrounded, so occupied, so attired, came the words:

“His beauty though bleeding,
And circled with thorns,
Is then most exceeding,
For grief Him adorns.
How can I but love Him?
But love Him, but love Him?
There’s no friend above Him,
Poor sinner, for thee.”

For my part, though the words were very pretty, and though they were well sung, I was more offended than pleased to hear them, recalling, as I did, the story of his life as related by him a few hours before. As I approached the fire, he turned and greeted me cheerfully—according to his ideas of cheerfulness.

“Good morning, my young friend. Did you sleep tight—as the children say? How does the brand of Cain feel by this time? Better go down and have a bath. All the perfumes of Araby will not sweeten that little right hand of yours, but you may be able to remove some of the soil of this pleasant, happy-land-

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of-Canaan where we are tabernacling at this time. Hurry, for breakfast will soon be ready.”

Seven days followed of wearisome, monotonous scramble from hill to gully, from gully to hill. Never possible to go one mile in a straight line. Many and many a time we climbed, with infinite labor, to the top of some cliff only to find that the way by which we had come was the only way down. Sometimes, in the ascent or descent of a hill, one or the other of us would slip and roll clear to the bottom unless stopped by some clump of bushes or some projection of the cliff. We waded streams, breast-deep sometimes, holding our weapons and ammunition above our heads. There were days when we had not a morsel of food, and nights when we slept in wet blankets on muddy ground.

I confess, I sometimes lost my temper and was often sullen and dispirited; but my companion never lost his cheerfulness for a moment. There was surely some capability of greatness in him, if he had but chosen the right course in life. In the day there was not much opportunity for talk, but at night, if we had any tolerable resting-place, and were not too tired to talk, Gilbert proved himself a charming companion. At times he would sing, the songs being usually of a religious character. Or he might discuss some religious, philosophical, or political theory in a manner

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that, while it might not be profound, was sure to be original. He knew by heart whole pages of Byron, Moore, and Scott, and he could quote more passages from Shakespeare than any man I have ever known. He had read much in the Bible and had a wonderful knack of quoting scripture for purposes of argument. Then, too, he had many a thrilling story to relate of his adventures in the wicked guerrilla life he had led.

At last, in the middle of the afternoon, on the eighth day of this horrible journey, we reached the northeastern border of the "Kingdom," and descended to the more level prairie. I verily believe that two more forlorn human scarecrows never stood in the light of day. Our raggedness was all the more striking, if anybody had been there to see, because of the original fineness of our clothes. I had on the ragged remnants of a broadcloth frock-coat, the tattered relics of what had been a pair of fine broadcloth pantaloons, and the wreck of a waistcoat which had been white on the morning of the fourteenth of June. The description of my clothes will serve very well for Gilbert's, except that his were not torn in exactly the same way, or in the same places. Then, in addition to this condition of looped-and-windowed raggedness, we had to consider the fact that we were heavily armed, and to imagine the sensation we should create if we suddenly appeared among civilized people.

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Where we came out upon the prairie, there was a spring near a small clump of bushes. Here Gilbert was so fortunate as to kill a deer with the rifle. We made a fire and cooked some of the meat, eating it as only hungry men could eat meat, half raw, without salt.

The shadow of the hill fell over our camping-place, and we lay there in the shade wondering what we ought to do next. While we debated this matter, we saw, low down on the eastern horizon, a small cloud of very black smoke. After a while we made out that this smoke was moving. Gilbert said at last:

“There is a railroad over there.”

And then we began to debate the question of our next move. To my mind, the issue was a very simple one. We could go back to the “Kingdom” and be safe; in which case we must sooner or later die of starvation and exposure; or we could go on to the nearest town, and get better clothes and something to eat; in that case we would be arrested, because, in the first place, any right-minded officer of the law would arrest such a pair on suspicion and, in the second place, the people of Gopher City must have used the telegraph, so that every sheriff, town marshal, and constable on the line of this road would be on the lookout for us. As I saw it, we might as well go back to Gopher City and enter the place in broad day, with

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a brass band, as to appear in any town along that railroad dressed and equipped as we were.

Gilbert congratulated me on what he was pleased to call my very clear and logical summing up of the case, but he had very little to say, except to declare that whatever happens in this life has been unchangeably ordained before the foundation of the world. When I asked him if he had any idea as to what the immutable decree might be in this case, he admitted that he had not. The upshot of our conference was that we decided to go forward warily and be guided by circumstances.

The next day, after we resumed our journey, setting our course by compass in the direction of the place where we had seen the smoke, Gilbert condescended to explain to me, in part, why he had attached himself to me.

"You may well believe," he said, "that a man with my knowledge and experience of men and events does not become accessory after the fact, in cases of homicide, from a chivalrous wish to help a noble young man in trouble. You may perhaps remember that when I first saw you in Gopher City, I approached you as if about to claim your acquaintance. That was because you bear a very striking resemblance to some one I know elsewhere. I was certainly very much surprised to find that individual in that town and, es-

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pecially, in that kind of a place. This, together with the fact that you did not know me, or did not wish to be recognized, prevented the greeting I was about to offer.

“I decided to make some inquiries, and they quickly settled the matter to my entire satisfaction, for I soon discovered that you were, from a moral point of view, not at all like the man whom you so much resemble physically. I think you are his equal mentally, if not his superior, and I take great pleasure in saying so, because I do not want to be more offensive than a strict adherence to truth requires. Your fellow-townsmen were unanimous as to that. They also agreed that you had a fair amount of courage or coolness—what is called nerve; and I cannot doubt it with the experiences of these last few days fresh in my memory. But, Mr. Carmichael,—I hardly know how to express it. The truth is you— Well, you are not quite what I should describe as a person of the strictest integrity of mind and heart—as the world looks at such things. No, never look fierce about it. You must surely know that yonder little affair of the ‘jack-pot’ was not strictly according to—what’s his name—Hoyle. Not according to Hoyle. Then you have a certain sly, demure, hypocritical way which enables you, I dare say, to fool yourself at times. Perhaps some day you will be a church-member in good standing, and it is

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conceivable that you may even believe in your own goodness, to a certain extent; but you will never be, while you live, goods of the right width and quality.

"I have said all this as a preface to some further talk I hope to have with you soon, with reference to a certain great scheme in which I wish to have your assistance. I will only say now that it has to do with your wonderful resemblance to the person I have mentioned. I have it all mapped out in my mind, except as to some minor details. There is money in it, big money for us both."

I spent most of the forenoon in trying to prove to Gilbert that, in his estimate of my character he was grossly at fault, but could obtain no admission of any mistake from him. He only laughed and said:

"Well, the Lord knows his own, Mr. Carmichael, and to them He will make known His purposes in due time. I do not presume to say you are not of the elect, but I cheerfully admit you are no bad hand at argument."

About noon we came to a small, wooded valley through which ran a bright little river, where, as the day was warm, we were glad to quench our thirst. As we could not ford the stream at the place where we reached it, a doubt arose as to whether it would be better to go up the stream or down it in search of a crossing. We settled the matter by tossing up a coin,

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and the coin decided for up stream. I mention the incident for the benefit of those who believe the world is ruled by chance. For in settling this point we settled also the question of our final deliverance from our present trouble. In a little while, as we made our way up the river, we heard voices before us. We advanced cautiously and came to the camp of an emigrant woman, whose dire misfortune, so wondrously are the affairs of this world ordered, proved of great benefit to us. Her husband lay dead upon a pallet by the camp-fire and she, with two children clinging to her dress, was weeping by his side. I have no thought of trying to describe this heart-rending scene at length. We approached the place and offered her such help as we could give. She did not appear to notice our exceedingly disreputable appearance. So dreadful was her situation, with her dear little ones in that wilderness, that she must have been glad of our help without troubling herself about our looks. Also, being from one of the older states of the union, she may have thought we wore the ordinary garb of the country.

We buried the man that same day. There was a spade in the wagon and we lined the grave with boards obtained by knocking to pieces some of the boxes in which her goods were packed. It must have been sad for her, poor soul, to see him buried in that

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rude way, but we did the best we could, and she seemed grateful.

While we were digging the grave, a short distance from the camp, Gilbert pointed out to me those aspects of the case which he regarded as truly providential—as far as we were concerned. He was sure, he said, that we could buy the woman's property—wagon, horses, provisions and cooking utensils. She must also have in her possession some clothing of her dead husband. There would, in all probability, be enough to furnish us both with a tolerably decent outfit. Our faces were now much tanned, our beards had more than a week's growth, nobody would be on the lookout, anywhere, for a couple of respectably dressed emigrants. Hence, all things considered, the danger of being taken by our enemies would not be worth a moment's worry.

The woman was glad to sell, and she named a price which was very reasonable. After our sad task was ended, she prepared supper and, while we ate, she told us the story of her husband's sickness and death. It was a sad story, but I cannot repeat it here. She gave us her husband's clothes and we went a short distance away and were soon sound asleep for the night.

As part of the bargain we had to take her to the nearest railroad station, which proved to be a small

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depot where there was only a railroad office and a house for the man in charge. We arranged for the shipment of such of her effects as she did not wish to sell; and we saw her safely aboard a passenger train, bound east for her home in Indiana.

And there are people who do not believe in chance!

Some weeks later we sold the team to a man in Eastern Kansas, at a fair profit on the original investment. There, no doubt, I should have parted from Gilbert; but there were various reasons why I did not—reasons which seemed very strong to me then. In the first place, he kept hinting at a great plan of his whereby we might make several thousand dollars in a very short time, promising to give me the details of it when we got to the scene of operations. Certainly, I was not averse to making as many thousand dollars as might be made honestly, within a reasonable time, having a high and, I hope, just appreciation of the value of money as a means of doing good in this world. In the second place, I was afraid of Gilbert—a singular reason, the reader may think, for remaining in his company. It is not to be denied that he was a very pleasant, companionable man at times. Nevertheless he let me see, every day and in many ways, that he was a hardened, desperate, wicked person with no proper notion of the sacredness of human life. Then, too, his knowledge of the affair at the

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Rock Crystal virtually placed me in his power. He did not, at this period of our intercourse, hint at any intention of using that affair as a coercive measure, because I was wise enough not to bring matters to that issue. Life, ever sweet to the young, was sweet to me, and hence I decided to cast in my lot with him for the time being. Perhaps my guardian angel wept when I so decided.

The sun was low when we reached the top of the ridge which bounds, on the West, the valley in which the town of El Agua is situated. The place is in the Ozark region of Southwest Missouri. As it is at least fifteen miles from the nearest railroad station, we were approaching it in a hack, from Schneidervale. We did not enter the town, but left the carriage at the bottom of the hill, and turned off, on a dim, rocky road which led away around the north end of the town, as near as I could make out.

We walked about three miles along this road, or rather path, until we came down into a place where the ground was flat and heavily timbered. Evidently this was bottom land adjacent to some river. Presently we had on our right a Virginia rail fence which seemed to be the northern boundary of an uncultivated farm. There was a quarter of a mile of this fence, and then, at the northeastern angle of the inclosure, we came upon a building of the kind known as a

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"double-log house." It was two stories in height, and the logs were hewn, but there were many outward signs of neglect. Along the front of it was a narrow verandah with a clap-board roof. In one of the lower rooms, through a window curtained with muslin, a light could be seen—for by this time it was growing dark. It seemed that this house was to be the end of our journey for that day. We crossed the fence by means of a stile and approached the building. As we came upon the porch a dog began to bark furiously, somewhere inside,—a large dog, to judge by his voice. Then the light vanished and some one said:

"Who is it?"

"Tie up the dog, Beulah, and let us in," said Gilbert.

The barking ceased and I heard the rattle of a chain, as if the animal were being led from the room. At last the door opened and a woman appeared in the doorway. It was so dark I could not see what the woman was like. Gilbert kissed her and said:

"My dear sister, how are you?"

She replied that she was quite well. The speech was commonplace, but the voice was not. It was not a masculine voice, yet it was not like any female voice I had ever heard. It was not coarse, not harsh, not rough. It was deep-toned—so deep as to be almost a mellow bass.

"Better light a lamp, my dear, as my friend and the

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dog might get mixed up in the dark. She disappeared for a moment and then there was a glimmer of light on the floor inside. Gilbert invited me to follow him, and we entered a room which appeared to be a sort of passage formed by boarding up the space between the two "pens" which formed the main part of the building. From this we passed into the room where the light had first appeared. The place was clean and very simply furnished. At one end of the room was a fire-place filled with green bushes; the logs, with the "chinking" between had been recently whitewashed. There was a clean-looking bed with white pillows and counterpane. The floor was covered with a rag carpet, and there were some chairs and a few other cheap articles of furniture.

"Sister Beulah, this is my friend, Mr. Michael Carmichael. My sister, Mr. Carmichael."

This was my introduction to this mysterious woman. I say mysterious because I know no more of her past, at this moment, than I knew when I first met her. She was a small woman, a good deal under medium size, I should say. There was no color of blood in her face; its ghastly, corpse-like appearance was emphasized, so to speak, by certain dark splotches, such as are seen in the faces of dead people when the first dreadful signs of decomposition appear. Her thin lips were blue, as if she might be cold. She had pale-

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yellow hair, and there was not too much of it. She had large, cold, lusterless, gray eyes. Her dress came down only to the tops of her shoes, and she had on a checked apron with a bib. If I had entered that room alone at that hour, and this lady had seen proper, to receive me in a white sheet, bidding me welcome in that deep voice of hers, it would have required a very strong room to hold us both.

She was polite enough in her greeting to me and appeared to be glad to see Gilbert. Though painfully aware of the impropriety of my conduct, I could not keep from staring at her and she, for some reason, appeared to be unable to keep from staring at me. After a while she left the room to prepare supper for us. At the supper table she said:

“I must beg your pardon, Mr. Carmichael, for staring at you, but your resemblance to—to some one else is so very remarkable, that it is hard for me to believe I am not the victim of some practical joke on the part of my brother.”

“I have heard something of this before,” I said, “yet the likeness can hardly have impressed you as it did your brother. He quite mistook me for—for the other fellow, whoever he is.”

“Yes, but I was prepared for something of the kind. When my brother wrote me from Kansas City, an-

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nouncing your visit, he mentioned the fact that you were wonderfully like—”

“Like A B, let us say!” interrupted Gilbert.

The next morning I took an early opportunity to examine the place. On all sides the clearing was surrounded by a very dense forest. The road, as I have said, was on the north side of the field. Beyond the little farm, a quarter of a mile to the east, it led to a ford of a little river. The only part of the land in cultivation was a small patch of garden ground near the house. Yet, although there was no sign of any wagon, cart, plow or other agricultural implement, with the exception of a hoe and rake near the garden, there were three good horses in the stable. After breakfast Gilbert said to me:

“I must go over to El Agua. I would ask you to ride over with me, only for good and sufficient reasons—reasons which you shall know in time—I want to keep you in the background for the present. You might go down to the river and try the fishing—there is plenty of fishing tackle and a minnow net. Or, if you prefer to read, Beulah has some books which she will be glad to lend you. Anyway, try to pass the time as pleasantly as possible. I will come back by noon.”

I went to the river because I wanted to be alone. I was not quite satisfied with these new surroundings.

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There was Gilbert's sister, for instance. In that story of his life, told by him in the dug-out, he had said nothing of a sister. I had supposed that he was an only child, the spoiled darling of his unfortunate mother. Was the whole story a fiction? Certainly, he had not told me the whole truth if this woman was indeed his sister. Several times since then he had intimated to me that he lived in this part of the state, but he had never given me the least hint of what his home was like. Not being entirely devoid of interest in the subject, I had settled several points in my own mind. I had persuaded myself that he lived at a boarding-house in some small town, where he carried on some kind of business which, although it might be a cover to some dark designs, would nevertheless be outwardly respectable. I had gone so far as to guess the exact nature of his calling. I had decided that he must be a lawyer, who perhaps added a real estate business to his practice, and hence it seemed probable that his contemplated scheme would turn out to be some kind of real estate speculation in which he wanted my help. But when I saw this house, three miles away from any other habitation, I had to admit that all my theories were wrong.

Perhaps the reader will wonder at what may, at first sight, appear to be my amazing imprudence in allowing myself to be persuaded to come so far, by a

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man who was, comparatively, a stranger, and to embark in a business the nature of which was entirely unknown to me. The man knew I was possessed of a considerable sum of money and he was, on his own showing, a hardened, desperate criminal. Yet it must be remembered that, if murder had been his object, he might easily have killed me in the Kingdom, with perfect safety to himself. Also, I ought to state here that, acting by his advice, I had deposited my money in a bank at Kansas City—all except a small sum for incidental expenses. I had no uneasiness on that score, but still I wanted to be alone, and so I went to a shady spot on the river's bank to fish—and think.

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CHAPTER V.

THE PLOT.

It was ten o'clock when I returned to the house. Miss Gilbert kindly offered to cook the fish I had caught, but firmly declined my offer to assist in dressing them. This was a disappointment to me, for I wished to try my conversational powers on her, with a view to drawing her out—as we lawyers say—on the subject of her brother. There is not, I confess, much food for laughter in my recollections of Beulah, but I laugh now when I think of my poor little plan to get the better of her discretion. Gilbert got home in time to be present at the noon dinner.

I have now to relate the substance of the conversation between the brother and sister at this meal. I thought little of it at the time, but I had good reason to remember it afterwards, because of a singular and sinister event with which it is associated—an event which, as will be seen, had an important bearing upon the destinies of this singular couple.

It appeared from the conversation, that about six weeks before our arrival a man had called at the house, pretending to be in search of work. He had come out, so he said, from El Agua. He was a very re-

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spectable looking individual, evidently a very nice, clean, capable farm-hand. He wore about his neck a new, red cotton handkerchief; he had on a pair of new overalls the legs of which were tucked into a pair of new, red-topped boots; he seemed to be about thirty-five years old and was, in appearance, quite the ideal man-of-all-work. Being told there was no employment for him, he asked for a glass of water. Beulah, when she gave him the water, was much struck by the whiteness and softness of this stalwart young ploughman's hands. She also observed a scar on his right hand,—a small white seam between the thumb and forefinger.

"Ah," said Gilbert, "you had no work for him? No, of course, you were all alone. What a pity—what a great pity!"

To me it was not clear why it was a pity. Beulah went on to say that a few days after the visit of this farm hand, a man had called to see if the "man of the house" had any stock—hogs—to sell. It had been raining and this person wore a rubber coat which was liberally bespattered with mud. He carried a stock whip, which he handled with the air of a thoroughly wide-awake drover. He rode upon a mule.

"Like Absalom?" suggested Gilbert.

"In respect of the mule, like Absalom; but, in one respect, most unlike him. It is written of that fine

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young prince that, from the crown of his head to the soles of his feet, there was no blemish on him. This typical cattleman had a blemish, for as he flicked at the weeds by the roadside with his whip, I observed a small white scar between the thumb and forefinger of his right hand."

"This morning," she continued, "while Mr. Carmichael was fishing, a very nice old gentleman came here in a buggy. It was a very prosperous-looking old person, and he said he wanted to buy land in the neighborhood. Observing the condition of this little farm he had ventured to call and ask if the place was for sale. I told him we were only tenants, but that, if he cared to write it down, I could give him the owner's address. He thanked me, and, after inquiring if he could speak to "the man of the house," got out a memorandum book and took down the address. To do this he had to remove the glove from his right hand. There was a scar between the forefinger and thumb."

After dinner Gilbert said briskly:

"Now for business. My visit to El Agua to-day was ostensibly to bring away our valises from the hotel where the hack driver had left them, but in reality I wished to know whether a certain person was at home. I want you to see him, but without being seen yourself



"THIS IS YOUR FAMOUS SPECULATION, IS IT?" — PAGE 83.

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--at least until we have effected some changes in your personal appearance."

He invited me to accompany him to the stable. We ascended to the loft where we found a quantity of oats sheaves piled in the middle of the floor. Gilbert took a pitchfork and tossed the sheaves aside, until he uncovered an old trunk, which he dragged to the small window through which grain was passed into the loft. He opened the trunk and, to my great surprise, I saw that it contained, among various other articles, a large assortment of false beards and wigs.

"Aha," I said, "this is your famous speculation, is it? We are to take the road with a dramatic company! Well, we might do worse. Often and often I have felt that I might succeed on the stage.

' Now is the winter of our discontent--' "

"Hush!" said Gilbert. " I never saw such a guesser. But do not proclaim the secret from the house-tops--or from the stable-loft either."

I picked up a wig of long, coarse, rust-colored hair, which attracted my attention by its striking combination of ugliness and seeming excellent workmanship. Before I could frame a question concerning it, Gilbert said: "That's Langly's scalp." I didn't understand at once, but the joy and pride in his voice was so manifest, that I turned my eyes inquiringly at him, and was shocked by the cruel hatred and wicked triumph shin-

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ing from his eyes. Then I suddenly remembered his story—and dropped the red mass as if it were a hot coal.

“Here, try this thing on!” he said.

The “thing” was made to look, externally, like a crop of black hair closely trimmed. It was designed to fit the head like a cap—did, in fact, fit my head very nicely. When my companion took a small hand-mirror from the trunk and showed me my reflection in it, I was startled. For my own hair being light, inclining even to red, the change in my appearance was very striking. My companion, rummaging in the trunk once more, produced a small pair of scissors.

“Now,” he said, “it seems a pity to sacrifice that lovely fox-colored—beg pardon—blonde moustache, but it must come off.”

And he clipped it as closely as he could with the shears.

“There,” he said, when he was through, “finish the job with your razor when you go to the house. Then, if you wear these smoked glasses, you will do very well.”

“But what is the part I am to act in this make-up?”

“You are to take the part of young Mr. Discretion in a drama called ‘Sordid Dust.’”

He then set to work to restore the trunk to its former hiding place under the sheaves. When we

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went to the house Beulah made no comment on my altered appearance. She did not even seem to notice it.

"If they are really actors," I said to myself, "she must be well used to this sort of thing." Next morning Gilbert and I rode into El Agua, the famous health resort of Southwest Missouri. For ages, no doubt, a spring of remarkably clear water had been bubbling up in a cup-shaped depression at the bottom of one of the hills of the Ozarks. The spring was the source of a small brook, which crept modestly away, almost lost among ferns, in a crooked channel, until it united with a much larger stream miles away. The water had a queer taste, and it left a yellow sediment on the rocks over which it flowed. The venerable mountain patriarch who owned all the land for several miles around the spring, had a son who was a law student in the University of Missouri. This youth had, of course, been familiar with the spring since childhood; but one day, while home on a vacation, it suddenly occurred to him that it might be well to have some of this water analyzed by the college chemist. The chemist made a "qualitative" analysis which disclosed a good many unexpected things in the water. There were silicon, and sodium, and ferrum, and magnesium—and ever so many other things ending in "on" and "um." The young man did not know what these

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might be worth to the human family, from a medical standpoint; but he thought perhaps they might be worth something to him, from a financial standpoint. Certainly it did not seem reasonable to suppose that Nature would be at the trouble of mixing a chemical formula like that if it were not good to take for some human ailment. The patriarch died, and the son published the analysis in the newspapers, organized a town-site company, with his brothers and sisters and himself as shareholders, and laid out a town, with a generous allotment of ground about the spring for a park. One result of the enterprise is now to be seen in the prosperous health resort, El Agua. It seemed proper to give the place a Spanish name, although the only Spaniard ever certainly known to be in that neighborhood was Hernando De Soto, who, according to a venerable tradition—of the town-site company—used the water for his rheumatism, obtaining instant and permanent relief. However this may be, there were scores of people, while I was visiting the place, who were continually rising up and calling that young man and his relatives blessed; and it was pointed out to me, in that connection, that rheumatic people are not given to rising up suddenly except for extraordinary reasons.

We reached El Agua about nine in the forenoon and put our horses in a livery stable. There was some

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kind of celebration that day—anniversary of something—I forget what. Already the park was thronged with the villagers, and wagons were constantly arriving, filled with country people.

The great event of the day was to be the delivery of certain speeches by “eminent public speakers secured for the occasion.” For the accommodation of these orators a platform had been constructed, not far from the spring, in the shade of some large trees. In front of this platform seats had been prepared for the accommodation of the hearers. Sometime before these exercises began Gilbert and I secured two of the seats farthest from the platform.

“I want you,” said Gilbert, “to look closely at the young man who will act as master of ceremonies.”

By this time the chairs on the platform were occupied by the gentlemen who were to speak. When the band quit playing, one of them, a young man in a gray suit, arose and advanced to the front of the stand and began to call for order.

“That is the man,” whispered my companion.

It is not easy for me to describe my sensations when I looked at him for the first time. I had an impression that he was known to me; that somewhere, at some time, I had even known him intimately. When he spoke there was something strangely familiar in the sound of his voice. I was sure, in another minute,

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I should be able to name him. Yet somehow the name did not come and the consequent feeling of bewilderment on my part grew to be absolutely painful. Gilbert touched me on the shoulder, when the man had finished the brief speech he had to make.

"Well," he whispered, "do you know him?"

"Yes—O yes—I certainly know him. What is more, I know him well. His name is—wait a minute—what is his name? Where have I seen him, or some one like him?"

"The last time you looked in the glass. That is, the last time before you shaved and put on a wig."

I looked at the man again. It was true. In height, figure, color of eyes and hair, in feature, in voice, in gesture even, the man was my counterpart. But why should the discovery give me a chilly feeling along the spinal column? I do not know why, but it did.

"Come away," whispered Gilbert.

We went to a remote corner of the park where we were quite alone.

"Have you a twin brother?" he asked.

"No," I replied. "So far as I know, I have no living relative."

"Glad to hear it," he said. "Rather a heartless speech, eh? But if you have no living relative, it follows, of course, that this man is no kin to you. Hence you will have the less reluctance to enter heart and

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soul into—into the part of young Mr. Discretion, you know.”

Now I had for some time perceived that my notion about the drama was all wrong, because when I had time to think the matter over, I saw the idea was foolish for many reasons; but I said:

“What has my resemblance to this young man to do with my acting a part in a play?”

“Wait. This is not the time or place to discuss that. We will talk when we get home. I wanted you to see this man for your own satisfaction—and information.”

“But who is he?” I said. “What is he?”

“His name is Hamilton Lindsay. He lives here with his mother and sister, and he is a lawyer—another remarkable point of resemblance, by the way. But now, as a matter of prudence, let us separate. Meet me at the livery stable at three o’clock.”

It was nearly four o’clock when we got home. After caring for our horses we went to the house and found Beulah on the verandah, reading. The weather was very warm and, as the porch was a cool place, we joined her there. Gilbert wasted no time. He drew his chair up near mine and began:

“The time has come, the walrus said,
To talk of many things,—
Of shoes—and ships—and sealing wax—
Of cannibals—and kings—
And why the sea is boiling hot—
And whether pigs have wings.”

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"In other words, the time has come for a council of war. My sister Beulah must be taken into our confidence, for many reasons. For this reason, among others, that I know her to be a person of fine judgment and sound discretion, perfectly loyal to any cause she may espouse."

The lady acknowledged this handsome compliment by turning down a leaf to mark her place in the book, depositing the book on the floor by her chair, and folding her hands in her lap.

"My friend, Michael, has seen Hamilton Lindsay, my dear."

She made no reply. She appeared to be contemplating the tops of the trees across the road.

"He was overpowered by the resemblance," he added.

"I was overpowered by it myself," she said.

"And surely it is no light thing that overpowers you, my dear. But let us come to the point. The point is that Mr. Carmichael must go to Kansas City at once, and insure his life for as many thousand dollars as we can pay premium on for a year."

Beulah turned her livid face toward me and stared at me with her cold, lusterless, gray eyes. For the second time that day I experienced a sensation of cold along my spinal column.

"What on earth do you mean?" I managed to say at last.

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"I mean what I say. Of course, I will pay half the premium."

"But why, in the name of common sense? And what has insuring my life got to do with—"

"With young Lindsay? Suppose that young legal light should suddenly go out? What if I tell you he has hardly six months to live? Will it be possible for you, do you think, to grasp the idea that such a chance can only happen about one time in a thousand years?"

"I do not know," I said. "I have not seen this chance yet—whatever it is."

"All in good time. No man should ever give himself up for an idiot, while he has youth and opportunity to learn. Listen. If young Lindsay dies he will be buried. I know you to be tainted with Arminianism, but you are surely not so heretical as to doubt the resurrection of the dead. Do you begin to see now?"

I began to be uncomfortable. Was it possible, I began to ask himself, that I had been in company with a lunatic all this time? I had read of the diabolical cunning which enables insane persons to conceal their malady sometimes, even from experts. Were Gilbert and his sister both crazy? I looked at Beulah. She had turned her gaze in the direction of the tree tops.

"I hope you are not such benighted pagan," he went on, "as to deny the resurrection. For if, in this

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particular enterprise, the dead are not raised, assuredly my preaching is vain and your hopes of a dividend are vain."

"Mr. Gilbert," I said soothingly, "if I were you I would not talk any more just now. I am sure you feel like lying down—it is very hot. In fact, I do not feel well myself."

He stared at me for a moment in a way that made me feel uneasy. This was the only time in my experience of him when he appeared to be, to use a pugilistic phrase, "knocked out." Beulah took the trouble to set us right.

"The man thinks you are crazy," she said, in her deepest tones, "and no wonder. I believe I know what you mean, if Mr. Carmichael does not. You mean that after young Mr. Lindsay is buried, he must be resurrected—a la Jerry Cruncher."

I hardly know which was the more shocking, the explanation or the cold, matter-of-fact way in which it was made.

"Exactly," said Gilbert, "and to prevent any further misunderstanding, I will explain more fully my plan, at least in its general outlines."

He took from an inside pocket of his coat an old, morocco-covered pocket-book. From this he took a newspaper clipping which he handed to me.

"Read it aloud," he said.

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What I read, amounted to this in substance: At a sale of unclaimed baggage, in a certain Eastern city, a man bought a trunk on the "sight-unseen" principle. There was a corpse inside the trunk. Another clipping, taken from a paper of later date, related how the dead man's friends were able to identify his body by reading the description of it in the newspapers.

"I always keep a warm corner in my heart," he said, "for the enterprising journalists. They have suggested a number of useful things to me. As soon as I had read this article—over a year ago—it seemed to me it ought to be preserved and studied. But I studied to no purpose until I discovered you, and then I began to see my way. For if this man dies—and he will die—there is nothing to hinder us from getting possession of his body. It will be easy to ship it somewhere and let it wait till the time comes when, according to law, it can be sold as unclaimed freight. If we send it to some large city, our friends, the newspaper fellows, will work the sensation for all it is worth, and the bigger the sensation, the better it will be for our scheme. We see it in the papers and recognize, from the description, our dear brother Samuel, or William, who left home suddenly and mysteriously last year. We come on, see the body and, sure enough, it's Sam, or Bill."

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“Yes,” I said, “but why this particular corpse? Why not any other dead body?”

“Bless my life, man, what is the matter with you? It should be plain enough. We will identify the corpse as you. And we will produce the insurance papers and collect the money as your heirs. Making a liberal allowance for expenses, we should make a big thing of it.”

I sat for awhile dumbfounded. The audacity of the scheme had almost taken away my breath. My throat felt hot and dry and I had to moisten my lips with my tongue before I could make any reply.

“But that—that sort of thing is—”

“Swindling? Yes. In this world the people, the good, as well as the bad, have large magazines full of hard, hot, strong, ugly words to fire at sinful men like us.”

He got up from his chair and stood by my side, placing his hand on my shoulder; at the same time Beulah got up and stood by one of the rough posts of the verandah, resting her cheek against the wood. This action on her part, trivial as it then seemed, I now interpret in the light of my subsequent experience of her and her brother. In some ways she was not overly squeamish, but I verily believe this movement was, on her part, an involuntary tribute to the weakness of her sex—a sort of womanly shrinking

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from what she feared might happen. Yet Gilbert's touch was almost a caress, and his voice, when he spoke again, was very soft.

"Swindling? Yes, that is what they call it. But when we remember the road we have both traveled in this life—the road we have traveled apart, no less than the one we have come together, shall we be turned aside from an enterprise of great pith and moment because of a hard word more or less. Undoubtedly it is swindling. What then?"

"What then!" I exclaimed. "What then? Do you ask? Why, then the felon's dock, the state's prison, and the unspeakable livery of shame!"

"Ah yes, to be sure. The felon's dock, and the state's prison. But as matters now stand, dear friend, are you quite clear of the felon's dock and—all the rest? Consider! The world's stock of hard words is not exhausted when it has said 'swindler.' For example, when a man has tried to lift a jack-pot in an irregular manner—why, your deceased friend, the mayor of Gopher City, had more hard words for that one little mistake than I would care to quote, if I could remember them all, even if there were no lady present. 'Cheat' and 'blackleg' will serve for specimens. And whenever a gentleman, pursuing fortune in an irregular manner—in the manner indicated by the words 'cheat' and 'blackleg'—finds it convenient to insert

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the point of a bowie knife just above the clavicle of another gentleman—in the other gentleman's own house, and at his own table,—they have an ugly word for that—O such an ugly word! They call it—what do they call it? Felon's dock! State's prison! Livery of Shame! Why, dear friend, a man who amuses himself in that fashion might well accept the state's prison and the livery of shame as a most blessed compromise with retribution.”

He went back to his chair and stood, with his hand on the back of it, regarding me with a smile that Satan might envy.

“Swindling, eh? My young friend, while we are together let us not play the hypocrite with one another. At least, do not you try to play the hypocrite with me. I am not mistaken in you. I have studied you attentively. Except that you are a little more of a hypocrite, a little more cold-hearted than I, there is not much to choose between us from a moral standpoint. The day when I reached this conclusion was a lucky day for you, a day to be marked with a white stone. But for that most opportune discovery, you would have dangled at a rope's end in Gopher City, or the wolves would have eaten you in the Kingdom. My dear friend, may I not hope that you will join me in this little enterprise? Surely you will not disappoint me in this matter. After all, it will only be a spoiling

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of the Philistines. Only a bloated corporation or so will be the worse, if we succeed."

Neither in the matter of this speech nor in the manner of its delivery was there the least suggestion of any unpleasant consequences if I refused. Yet Beulah left the porch and went and leaned over the fence. Many times since that day I have thanked heaven because it has gifted me with such ready presence of mind. As by a flash of lightning, I saw the awful pit I had dug for my own feet. I had placed myself in the hands of this unscrupulous villain. I was a lost man if I did not do as he wished.

"I am with you," I said, with seeming heartiness. "That last remark about those vampires, the insurance companies, has placed the matter in a new light. If it had been directed against private persons I should have refused your proposal at any cost."

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CHAPTER VI.

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The words had hardly left my lips when a thought, an awful thought, occurred to me, almost freezing the blood in my veins. I had been so interested in the unfolding of Gilbert's plans that I had forgotten, for a moment, his astonishing prediction about young Lindsay. How could he know when the man would die? Was it possible that his plan included the murder of that young man? I sunk back in my chair almost overcome by my feelings.

"Gilbert," I said, "for heaven's sake—. How can you—how do you know—"

"About young Lindsay? Yes, I ought to have explained that before. Our little drama without the necessary corpse would be like Hamlet with Hamlet omitted. How very forgetful I am! I might know, of course, that this would be a great point with a man who does not war on private persons, a man, moreover, who is naturally tender of human life. By the way, have you ever lost any sleep about that man whom we left lying, with a broken leg, under his horse at the gate of the Kingdom? You may remember that, when we left him, he had the cheerful pros-

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pect of being trampled to death by his friends. I confess, his sad plight is remembered by me now for the first time since that day, but I suppose it has worried you a good deal. You have never mentioned it, but it must have worried you—unless it has been overlooked in the press of more important matters.”

Cruel and unjust, in this as in all things. True, I had not wasted any vain regrets upon the evil men who might have hurt one another in trying to hurt me. But I was not then as I am now. Now I can pity; now I can forgive; now I can pray for all who have despitefully used me; then I was in the gall of bitterness. However, my ready presence of mind stood me in good stead, even under the pain of that bitter gibe. I laughed, and told him to get on with his explanation.

“It is very simple,” he said. “I have it from sure authority that Mr. Lindsay has heart disease which will surely carry him off in six months, or in less time.”

I do not know whether Gilbert believed this or not. I have conversed with medical gentlemen who would say of this or that person afflicted with disease of the heart, that he might die within a few months; but I have never known any physician who would fix a definite date for death in such cases. Honestly, I dis-

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trusted Gilbert's intentions and my mind was full of sad forebodings.

No doubt, the perfect frankness with which I have related these things will be misunderstood by some; and no doubt, they will be misrepresented by others. Some will say that it was my duty to rise up, in the strength of my manhood, defy Gilbert, and bid him do his worst. To them I reply that I was young and that life was sweet to me. This bad man had only to lift his finger to subject me to an ignominious prosecution for murder—a prosecution which I had to admit would be equivalent to conviction. And that was not all: I felt then, and I am sure now, that if I had refused, I should never have seen the light of another day.

They went away, after a while, and left me there alone on the verandah. I watched the night fall over those gloomy woods. I heard the owls hoot down by the river. Tree frogs began to croak, and bats were flitting overhead. If I were killed, my corpse, buried somewhere in the gloomy depths of that forest, might well lie there undiscovered until the judgment day. Surely a more dismal and uninviting last resting-place could not be found. I shuddered at the thought, rose, and went into the house.

Even Robinson Crusoe in his island found, in the

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midst of his troubles, many good things for which to thank heaven. So I, led as a lamb to the slaughter, coerced into a scheme from which my whole soul revolted, in the clutches of one of the most hardened and remorseless of villains, found cause for thankfulness in this darkest period of my life. It was a comfort to know that if any loss to anybody should result from our enterprise, it must fall upon a soulless corporation and not upon any private persons. If our success had meant loss to any innocent, private person, to the amount of one penny, I would have refused to go into the business, even at the risk of my liberty or my life; but I have never seen the day when I have been willing to risk my life for the benefit of an insurance company. I have thought of setting forth here the essential difference, morally speaking, between a conspiracy to rob a corporation and one to despoil an individual; and with this end in view I meant to write an exhaustive treatise on the subject. But the subject is too lengthy to embody in this book. It would form a valuable addition to every lawyer's bookcase, for it would cover the whole field and establish the correct principles of ethics in a most convincing and conclusive manner.

We arranged to leave that neighborhood at once. For various reasons we wished to retain possession of

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the house, and, fortunately, Gilbert had a lease for a term of years. He undertook to satisfy the landlord as to our reasons for going away. We took nothing with us except necessary wearing apparel. Beulah went in the mail wagon to Schneidervale, whence she went by rail to Kansas City. We gave the dog to a neighbor, and Gilbert and I rode the horses as far as Independence, where we sold them.

At Kansas City matters worked smoothly enough. I passed the physical examination easily—was, in fact, recommended by the examining physician as an extra good “risk.” I shall not state the exact amount of the insurance; it was well up in the thousands. When all things were arranged to our liking we left Kansas City for St. Joseph. After spending a few days in St. Joseph, we decided to go and live in Janeville, a charming little village not far from the Iowa line. It was Gilbert’s theory that when a man desires to hide, he ought to go to a large city; but when he wishes to be known to a great many people in a very short time, he ought to go to a village of about five hundred people, like Janeville. As there were many other villages equally available within fifty miles of St. Joseph, the thing which finally determined the selection of Janeville was an advertisement, in a daily newspaper, of a hotel to rent, ready furnished, in that village.

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"Let us go into the hotel business," said Gilbert, after reading the advertisement to me. "It will be the very thing. I shall be landlord, Beulah will be landlady, you shall be clerk. As your name, in the insurance policies, is George William Ward, my name will be Charles Henry Ward, and Beulah will be our sister, Miss Beulah Ward. The Ward family, in short—two bachelor brothers and a maiden sister."

We readily secured the lease of the house. Gilbert played the part of landlord to the entire satisfaction of his guests, and, I may add, to his own. The little, old, wooden hotel had never been so popular before. I dare say it has never been so popular since. For as Gilbert cared only to make running expenses, he was willing to spend what might have been his profits on the table. And so the "Palace Hotel" became, to the travel worn "drummer," as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land.

Other good fortune awaited us in Janeville. There was a sort of down-at-the-heel printing office where a hungry-looking, sad-eyed printer toiled, week after week, to produce a newspaper called "The Janeville Banner." I made a bargain with this discouraged individual in virtue of which I became lessee and manager, while he became foreman, compositor and pressman.

It was a very good arrangement for all concerned.

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For me, because I quickly achieved honorable distinction in that part of the world as editor of the brightest little country paper in the state. There was snap, and sparkle, and vim in the local news columns, while my heavy editorials on the leading topics of the time made people open their eyes. Over and over again, such competent judges as the postmaster, the principal of the school, Dr. Lantz, the village physician, and the two pastors of the local churches, assured me they read nothing better than my editorials in the journals of St. Louis or other large cities.

All this served our purpose exactly, because it widened the circle of my acquaintance as nothing else could have done. The farmers for miles around all knew me and accosted me familiarly as "Georgie." By the end of the second week I felt perfectly free to mention any business man in the place, in my local columns, by his first name. This was good for the printer also, as it increased the value of his property about one hundred per cent. One very pleasant feature of it all was that I actually cleared a little something over and above expenses. No mammon worshipper am I, as already hinted, but I am not so immoral, I trust, as not to perceive the sinfulness of useless waste of money. A happy, peaceful life it was, but even here I was not to escape the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune.

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The change from the moral atmosphere of Gopher City to the moral atmosphere of Janeville could not but be very refreshing to a man of culture. It was curious to note the points in which the one community differed from the other. In Gopher City there were two chief places of public resort, the "Rock Crystal" saloon and the "Morning Light" cafe; while the population might be divided into three classes: those who patronized the "Rock Crystal," those who patronized the "Morning Light," those who patronized both indifferently. In Janeville the two chief places of public resort were the Methodist church, and the Baptist church; and here, too, the people might be divided into three tolerably distinct classes: the Methodists, Baptists, and the people who belonged to no church, but acknowledged "leanings" toward one or the other of the denominations above mentioned. In Janeville such an institution as the Rock Crystal saloon would have been viewed with horror and aversion; and any man so lost to all sense of religion and morality as to patronize such an institution would have been socially ostracised. The two pastors were on very good terms with each other; and, while there was undoubtedly a mild sort of rivalry between the two denominations, it seldom resulted in anything unseemly. When one minister addressed the other as "brother," we understood that it was done in perfect sincerity, although

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there was, of course, always a very mild, but manifest reservation of manner, intended to signify to all beholders that brotherly recognition must not be regarded as a compromise with error.

In the theological discussions which arose sometimes between members of the two flocks, I, as was to be expected, took no part, but Gilbert was soon recognized as the champion of "believers' baptism," "close communion," and "final perseverance." He was therefore in high favor with the Baptists, especially as the other party had no champion, among its lay members, of equal ability. Privately, Gilbert informed me that the Baptist minister was himself little better than a heretic, being a "missionary," while Gilbert endorsed the "primitive" or, as is vulgarly called, the "hardshell" contention. These things are mentioned that the reader may perceive how great was the change, in moral environment, from Gopher City to Janeville.

I made it a point to attend the services of both congregations with judicious impartiality. At the M. E. Sunday school I sometimes taught the young women's Bible class; at the Baptist church I frequently led the singing, having a very good tenor voice. It was therefore quite natural that many good people in each congregation should manifest an interest in the ques-

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tion of my salvation—an interest for which I was, and am, sufficiently grateful.

I think it a remarkable instance of the mysterious way in which the affairs of this world are ordered, that while one great sorrow of my life is clearly traceable to my association with bad men in Gopher City, another great sorrow is traceable to my association with good people in Janeville. We had not been there long when the two congregations, moved by an earnest desire for the salvation of souls, decided to unite in what is known as a “protracted meeting.” To that end, they secured the services of a very able revivalist. These meetings were carefully advertised, by posters and by notices in the newspapers of the county, so that from the first the audiences were very great. A large tent was procured and fitted up for the accommodation of the people, since no church in the town would hold them all.

I have dwelt in this vale of tears many years, and am not, I venture to assert, without experience of men and events; but I do not hesitate to say that this meeting stands out in my memory as the most remarkable event of my life; and the revivalist was to me one of the most remarkable men. A gifted man certainly, a godly man I earnestly believe. Yet there were times when, in the pulpit, he allowed himself to approach so close to the line which separates decent and rever-

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ent language from irreverent and indecent language, that I almost held my breath for terror. Nevertheless, he steered himself with such admirable coolness and dexterity among these verbal reefs and shoals that I was soon compelled to admit my fears on his account were vain. I soon quit worrying about the preacher and began to worry about myself.

Somehow—I do not know how or where—I had got the idea, in my boyhood, that the mate of a steamboat is absolutely above and beyond competition in the use of violent and abusive words. While I should be sorry to undervalue any talent on the possession of which any man may pride himself, I am free to assert my belief that no steamboat mate that ever lived, from the infancy of steamboating until now, was ever worthy to hold a candle to this gifted revivalist, in the matter of strong language. To me, it seemed that he had broken into Satan's armory, taking therefrom Satan's choicest weapons, which he was now using, with terrific effect, against their original owner and his minions. He was also a witty man, with a wit which other less gifted men have in vain sought to borrow. It resembled nothing in nature so much as the jagged lightning, flashing and quivering upon the breast of the storm cloud; and it was the kind of lightning that strikes—the kind that seldom has occasion to strike twice in the same place. I was about to

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compare him with Jupiter, only it is impossible to imagine Jupiter wearing a black coat and a white string-tie. Also, I feel quite sure, the licentious, hen-pecked, old humbug, who was called "Sire of gods and men," never employed his thunderbolts with such nice judgment, such godlike impartiality, such exquisite marksmanship, as this earnest and fearless man who conducted the Janeville meeting.

Where and how did he obtain such an intimate acquaintance with the sinful, unregenerate heart of man? Whence did he procure that accurate catalogue of evil deeds men do under the heavens? How did he come to know so well all the underlying, evil motives which are the springs of wicked action? His testimony against sin did not impress the hearer as hearsay evidence; his judgment of vice did not appear to be the crude opinion of a mere novice; rather it was the ripe conviction of the expert. Yet, how could he have experimental knowledge of the vices he described with such accuracy of drawing, such minuteness of detail, such wealth of color? For he had spent twenty-three years in the ministry of his church and was, at this time, no more than forty-three years old. When I discussed the matter with Gilbert he said it was genius. I think it was inspiration.

The first to feel the force and effect of his thunderbolts were the weak-kneed, cowardly, cold-hearted

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professors of religion. In a little while all these were beating their breasts and calling for mercy. Then the preacher turned his guns upon the sinners, who went down before him like grass before the mower's scythe.

It may be remembered how, on a certain occasion of great peril, the words, "Except ye repent ye shall all likewise perish," had been borne in on me. These words began to haunt me under the preaching of the revivalist. They rang in my ears, and sometimes they appeared before me in letters of fire. By the lurid light of the preacher's forensic bombardment. I perceived how close I stood to the "slippery steps that lead to the opaque profundity of damnation." Beyond a doubt, hell gaped for me. Night after night I went to the "anxious-seat," where godly men and women prayed for me. Yet I could not obtain what I sought—and right well I knew the reason why. There were times when I looked over the audience and saw Gilbert's cold eyes fastened upon me; and the look invariably sent a chill to the marrow of my bones. It was understood that anybody in the audience might come forward and exhort the "mourners," or pray for them, and one night, after I had gone up there for perhaps the fifth time, Gilbert came, with characteristic audacity, kneeled by my side, and putting one arm about my neck whispered into my ear:

"It is the golden wedge of Achan, my dear brother

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—and the Babylonish garment—hidden in your tent. Unless you discover these things you pray in vain. Salvation there is none for you, until you let these dear, good people know all about your career at Gopher City and the reasons why you are bearing the name of George William Ward, instead of Michael Carmichael. It is no use to approach God with a lie on your lips—or in your life. The road to heaven, for you, is by way of the hangman's noose, or the penitentiary. It is a very simple issue. Go on as you are and be damned; or confess and be saved—and hanged. Choose you this day whom you will serve!"

I believe I fainted under the agony of that cruel speech, for I was conscious of nothing more, until the movements of people leaving the tent aroused me. I got up and staggered down the aisle—where I met—an angel.

I have no idea of being profane. I am perfectly sincere in describing her as an angel—an angel in human form, but an angel nevertheless.

How can I make any one who did not know her understand what manner of woman she was, how sweet, how good and true, how beautiful in mind and person. Yet I will try to describe her. I put down my pen, lean back in my chair, close my eyes, and she comes back to me. I think I could be content to

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keep my eyes closed forever if she would remain——
Alas! she will not.

She had hazel eyes. Her hair was a luxuriant brown. Her form was slender—rather too girlish, some people said. Once, when she stood by my side, (I am five feet ten inches in height), I observed that her head came exactly to the level of my shoulder. I remember it well, because at the time I was sorely tempted to bend over and kiss one of those brown tresses; it would have been so easy—if I had dared. Her brows were arched—not too heavy—a trifle darker than her hair. Her nose was straight, with delicate nostrils. There was never at any time much color in her cheeks, but her skin was very clear—and soft—and white. Her mouth—I dislike to use that over-worked phrase, “cupid’s bow,” in describing her mouth; but that would be the right phrase certainly. A most sensitive, delicate, beautiful, rosy mouth. Her teeth were white and small, and even.—While I write these words a blizzard is howling outside, and it is nearly midnight. I would walk ten miles, through a worse storm, to win one smile from that sweet face. To see her smile was like seeing the sunlight suddenly flash out over a crystal lake just kissed by a summer zephyr. There was a dimple in her chin, but the chin itself may have been a trifle—just a trifle—too firm. Some phrenologists might call

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it an obstinate chin. On that summer evening she wore a very simple white dress with some honeysuckle blossoms pinned to the bosom of it.

Have I mentioned her name? I think not. She was Judith Wymore, daughter of the Baptist minister. I would have passed her at the door of the tent, but she detained me by a touch of her hand on my arm.

“Mr. Ward,” she said, “you are in much trouble. Will you not come and speak with my father?”

As her father had left the place, I went home with her. A summer night it was, with a full moon shining in a cloudless sky. We passed a yard where fragrant honeysuckles were in bloom; we passed a garden where a tall hollyhock, bending over the palings, touched her hair; we crossed a bridge over the little stream which flows through the village (there was a white square of moonlight at the center of a pool, in a frame of ebony, where shadows of banks and bushes lay dark on the margins of the stream); we passed by a meadow-lot where cattle were lying down in the clover—a bell worn by one of them tinkled drowsily; we went up the slope of a little knoll, which was covered with blue-grass, to a white cottage with black locust trees in the yard; behind the cottage was an orchard.—Why do I remember all this? I took no note of these things at the time, yet I must be old—

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old—old, when my memory loses one trivial detail of that walk.

We entered the house, and her father greeted me cordially. He was a tall old man, with a strong, handsome, intellectual face. He was a man of learning and was deservedly beloved by the people of the town. He was a Virginian by birth; both he and his daughter spoke with the soft intonation of the Southerners. Warned by the failures of many distinguished literary people who have tried to give, on paper, some idea of that accent and intonation, I shall not attempt it here. There is no device known to the printer's art that can accomplish that result. When the intelligent compositor can evolve from his case the sounds of harp-strings, the sighings of summer winds, the cooing of doves, and the songs of thrushes, it will be then in order for some writer to attempt to represent by phonetic device the speech of the Southern lady. But I wander from the subject.

I spent an hour or two with Mr. Wymore, but, as I could not well confide my secret to him, it was little help he could give me. He did what he could—what is usual in such cases—he read the Bible to me, prayed for me, and exhorted me to throw myself unreservedly on the mercy of God. Unreservedly! There was the rub! The golden wedge and the Babylonish garment were hidden in my tent, and well I knew that, until

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the hiding-place of the accursed thing should be disclosed, the preacher could do me little good. How could I make Achan's confession without accepting Achan's fate?

It was late when I left Mr. Wymore, but, late as it was, I found Gilbert waiting for me. There was a ring in his voice which I did not like when he accosted me almost before I crossed the threshold.

"How about Achan, young man? Is he to be delivered over to the wrath of Israel? Or will he hold on to the spoil a little longer? As a person slightly interested, I wish to know. I need not remind you, of course, that a disguised body"—he emphasized the word disguised—"is not absolutely essential to the cashing of these policies. A genuine corpse—but we will not pursue the subject."

I sat down in a chair and stared at him helplessly. He crossed his hands behind his back and began to walk the floor. In a little while he began to sing or rather to chant in a low voice:

"'Man must die. One dies by day,
And near him moans his mother;
They dig his grave, and tread it down,
And go from it full loth.
And one dies about the midnight,
And the wind moans, and no other;
And the snow gives him a burial—
And God loves them both.'"

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Suddenly he paused in his walk and came and stood before me with folded arms, and said:

“What of Achan?”

“It is useless to talk,” I said. “I cannot face the consequences of a confession. You must know that very well.”

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CHAPTER VII.

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“Ah,” he said, “there spoke the good, hard, worldly wisdom which I have so often admired in—in my dear brother George. Glad indeed to observe that no amount of spiritual excitement can overcome in you that keen perception of self-interest which has heretofore been so notable a trait in your character. Certainly, there is nothing else to do. By the way, have you considered what a commotion in Janeville a true and circumstantial account of your late doings would create? My, what a brand plucked from the burning! And how hard for those godly people to flourish that brand without burning their fingers. It must be a thrilling moment in the life of a church when a man becomes a candidate for church membership, being also, at the same time, a candidate for the penitentiary. Have you asked yourself which of these two churches would offer the most inducements to get you to join—the other? I ought to inform you that I saw a pair of very nice, dark eyes looking at you to-night—very tender eyes, with a very tender look in them. What would be their expression, I wonder, if

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they saw you in custody of the sheriff, adorned with a pair of hand-cuffs?"

I had now, under the cruel pressure put upon me by this heartless rascal, to take another step down the ladder which descends into the bottomless pit. Gilbert declared that I had made myself conspicuous in the community, by the overwhelming nature of my "conviction" and by the stubbornness with which my hardened, obdurate heart resisted the good influences which had been brought to bear upon it. If I should give up the fight at that point, it would not only be a cause of pain and disappointment to the good people, but it would make them curious as to the probable cause of my spiritual troubles. Curiosity might lead to inquiry, and inquiry—well it was always to be avoided by persons situated as we were. Hence he urged me to "make a profession" and join one of the churches, because it was absolutely essential that we should be under no suspicion while in Janeville.

As a practical man I could not fail to perceive the wisdom, as the world understands the word, of doing as he suggested. And I did it, but this heart alone knows the agony of shame and humiliation it suffered in that supreme act of deceit. I was, in fact, received into the Baptist congregation according to their practice in such matters. I gave preference to this church, not so much on theological grounds, as because

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I felt grateful to Judith and her father. The church people were, of course, not slow to avail themselves of such talents as I possessed. I quickly found an abundant entrance into all the activities of the congregational life. This necessarily brought me into most intimate relations with the minister and his family, Judith included.

If I could properly tell this story without any further mention of this lady, I would surely do so, for the subject is too painful to be discussed with any degree of satisfaction to me, under any circumstances. Without further circumlocution I will say that I fell in love with her. Which is the simple and obvious explanation of the fact that I now allowed myself to enter a sort of fool's paradise, closing my eyes deliberately to all that was painful and perilous in my position. I sought her presence as often as I could, because there I found peace. In her society the wicked scheme in which I was involved seemed to slip away into the realm of dreams—a hideous nightmare which the sunshine of her presence banished from my memory. With her near me, I seemed to be a better man, with nobler aims and higher notions of life and duty. In spite of the “golden wedge” I felt a peace in her society which I almost hoped might be the peace that passeth understanding.

Summer ended, September passed, October came

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with its wonted pomp and splendor. One evening I walked home with Judith from the prayer meeting. Again a bright moon shone from a cloudless sky, but there were no hollyhocks in bloom—only painted leaves on the trees, and golden-rod by the wayside. Once more we came upon the bridge which spanned the little stream. Near the middle of it we paused and looked down at the shadowy waters speeding by. Again, as on the first night when we crossed the bridge, the moonlight lay in a bright square upon the center of the pool—the pool where her father had recently baptized me. From the trees which overhung the water, leaves fell silently from time to time, and the current bore them away.

“It is very beautiful,” I said; “the world is very, very beautiful. If only there were no sorrow in it. As I look at the earth, bathed in this tender light, at the bright stars looking calmly down upon it, at the tranquil sky bending over it, sorrow is almost unbelievable. Yet it is here. Possibly there is not a square inch of this landscape where something does not suffer and die; certainly, there is not a square mile of the part visible to us where some human heart is not suffering or bleeding. It seems to me that this smiling tranquility of the heavens, as they bend over a blood-drenched, pain-racked world, almost justifies the old

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heathen notion that the gods are heartless—indifferent as to what happens on earth.”

Coming from me, this will be regarded as an exceedingly sentimental speech, considering that I am essentially a practical man. Nevertheless, as I have mentioned before, I possess the poetical temperament which presupposes a keen sense of the beautiful in art and nature. Also, I should say, there must come moments, one moment at least, in the life of the most practical man living, when he must become sentimental, to a certain extent.

“In this life,” she replied, “we see as through a glass, darkly; and perhaps the heathen you spoke about were over-hasty in criticising ‘the gods.’ Certainly, it hardly becomes the human part of creation to whimper over the woes of a ‘blood-drenched, pain-racked world,’ since men have done so much to make it so and keep it so. If this earth is a hell, it is largely a hell of man’s making; and it rests with him, I think, to make a heaven of it when he will.”

“Miss Wymore,” I said, “do you really believe that the evil men do in the world, and to the world, is altogether voluntary? Is not that a dangerous doctrine? Does it not savor a little of Arminianism to say that the world is bad because man wills it to be bad, and may be good when man wills it to be good? What becomes of the sovereignty—”

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"Oh," she interrupted, with a laugh, "I am no theologian—you must go to my father for that. Nor am I a logician, I am a woman. To me the readiness of the average man to unload his faults upon others—upon God sometimes—is rather pitiful. You know a woman must resent that—logic or no logic, theology or no theology—because one of woman's earliest and most painful experiences was the rather sudden development of this essentially masculine trait—in the case of our father Adam."

"But is it not conceivable," I said, "that a man might be so situated as to be compelled, by pressure which he cannot resist, to do things which he knows to be wicked in themselves—things from which, if left to himself, he would shrink with loathing? Is a man, so situated, to be greatly blamed? It seems to me he is rather to be pitied."

She turned and faced me. The light of the moon caused her face to look very pale. I thought she looked like a saint in some old picture.

"Who is the man?" she asked. "Is he a myth or a reality?"

The question was unexpected and, to a certain extent, confusing, but I answered as promptly as I could:

"Well, he is—let us say—not altogether a myth."

"Not altogether? Which means, I suppose, that he is part myth and part flesh and blood."

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She smiled saucily as she said it.

“Ah,” I said, “you ought to be a lawyer. But let us assume, for the purposes of this discussion, that he is all flesh and blood.”

“Is he a full grown man? Is he sane? Is he a man of any courage, moral or physical? Altogether, is he the sort of man who has a right to be abroad without a keeper?”

“Yes,” I said, “he is sane, full grown, strong in mind and in body.”

She stood with her side to the parapet, leaning her elbow upon it and resting her cheek in her open palm. She did not speak immediately. The saucy smile slowly faded out of her eyes, giving way to a pained expression.

“I do not understand. Is it too much to ask you to explain how such a man comes to be in a position like that? He must do evil, you say, evil which his soul loathes? And he must do that, not because he wishes it, but because it is the will of another—or others? Yet, he is a sane man in good bodily health. I do not see how that is possible—but then I am only an inexperienced girl and am therefore ignorant of many things. Do you mind explaining further?”

Did I mind explaining further! Did I mind explaining how I happened to have a hangman’s noose around my neck, and how a certain man named Gil-

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bert could lead me around whenever he chose, in whatever direction he wished me to go, by the simple process of tightening the noose! Did I mind explaining how this man had harnessed me in a cart and was driving me to perdition, using this hangman's rope as a driving rein! Certainly we were getting upon dangerous ground, and I had to ask myself how my two confederates would enjoy this conversation, if they could hear it. The situation called for the utmost discretion.

"It is this way," I said. "I had once a friend, a very dear friend—he is gone now, poor fellow. Well, this dear, good friend, in his lifetime, did a thing, in a moment of anger, under strong provocation—a thing which imperiled not only his life, but his good name. When I say he did this in a moment of anger, under extreme provocation, I state it mildly, because I do not want to prejudice you in his favor at this stage of my story. He escaped to another country, where he might have been safe but for the fact that one man, a hard-hearted, remorseless villain, knew of his fault and threatened to turn him over to the minions of the law—"

"Why do you say 'minions?' " she interrupted. "Are the people who enforce the law called minions?"

"Just a form of speech, borrowed from novels, or from the stage, I suppose. I certainly mean no dis-

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respect to the law and its myr—its agents. I am a lawyer myself. But this bad man, having it in his power to turn my friend over to the faithful guardians of society, used that power to compel his aid in a—well, to state it frankly, in a scheme to swindle some people out of a large sum of money.”

“So that the only alternative for your friend was to suffer for his own crime or to make other people suffer? You are a church member, and a Bible reader, and you are what is called a trained reasoner. Do you seriously propose that as a debatable question?”

“It does not seem to be debatable—as you state it; but then you state it rather too bluntly. Also you do not state the whole issue; which is not surprising, because you do not know the whole story.”

“That is what comes of arguing with a woman,” she said lightly. “But since you have asked for my opinion, ought I not to know the whole story?”

“Suppose, then, that the man was, before exposure was threatened, in a position of influence, a position where he could do much good, where he, in fact, did much good. Suppose, also, that exposure would not only destroy his personal influence, but must inevitably bring reproach upon a great and holy cause?”

“What great and holy cause is that which can be injured, when a man who has committed one crime refuses to commit another? Your friend might have

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denounced the villain who was hounding him on to crime. He might have been brave enough to accept, frankly, the consequences of his own fault. A man who would do that would adorn any cause. To be burned at the stake is not the only way to be a martyr—and how can a good and holy cause be hurt because a man has chosen to suffer shame for righteousness' sake? If your friend abhorred, as you say, the evil he was asked to do, that means that he suffered while doing it. It seems to me, the problem is very simple, after all. As I understand the case, it comes to this: shall a man suffer and do wrong, or shall he suffer and do right?"

It was rather adroitly put, I must say. She was very opinionated, as most women are, but she certainly had also considerable skill in arguing. She spoke these words very earnestly, yet not loudly, and in her zeal she had placed her hand lightly, unconsciously I think, upon my arm. She seemed more like a pictured saint than ever; and there was a pitying look on her face that made me catch my breath. Could it be that she suspected that I was the man in question?

It was not quite by accident that the conversation had taken this turn. I had deliberately led up to it, with what skill the reader may judge, because I had inwardly sworn to win this woman if I could, hop-

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ing against hope that I might retain her love, once I had won it. It was natural therefore I should be anxious to know how she might regard me, if by any accident she should become acquainted with recent events in my most unfortunate career. She was certainly the kind of woman to make sacrifices for the man she loved; and therefore I wished to confirm, if possible, a certain wild hope of mine that she might, in the event of our marriage, be persuaded that my compliance with Gilbert's plans was absolutely necessary to my safety. I loathed that scheme myself as heartily as she or any one could desire, but I was too young to die—and not prepared. I now concluded that she could never be entrusted with my secret, either before or after marriage. In this one thing she could never be a helpmeet to me. I continued the conversation, but rather for the purpose of keeping her with me a while longer, than for any other reason.

“But suppose,” I said, “there was a woman—a sweet, noble, true-hearted woman, who loved him and believed in him. What if his exposure should break her heart, or even destroy her love for him? What if this woman had so deep a hold upon his heart as to be the very guardian angel of his life? What if without her his life must fall to wreck and ruin? Consider also that the people against whom he was asked

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to conspire were not the sort of people over whom one grows sentimental. Suppose also that the loss of the money, though considerable to a private individual, would not be particularly felt by the rich corporation which was, in fact, to be the victim of the conspiracy. I say again, the woman was essential to the man's well being in every way—especially in a moral way. Should his soul weigh nothing in the scales of justice? Might it not very well outweigh the paltry dollars and the slight inconvenience their loss would occasion the owners—provided he himself refused to share the spoil?”

As I read this little speech over, it seems to me to be quite as eloquent and forcible as anything I said that evening, but I have to confess it did not impress Judith in that way.

“I should like to know that woman,” she said, “who was so mighty for some purposes, and so weak for others; who could be so benign in some respects and so malign in others; whose love might be so valuable to a man who was doing wrong and so useless to the same man if he should want to do right; whose heart could be so noble and true in the day of sunshine and so very, very fragile in the day of storm; whose influence could be such a sure anchoring ground if the world smiled and so insecure if it frowned. Is it indiscreet to ask if the lady is dead also?”

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I wisely ignored this last question, because this little outburst of scorn on her part gave me the clue I needed, for it revealed to me, very clearly, that here was a true and staunch comrade in adversity—for the man she loved. It was open to me now, or at any future time, assuming that she loved me, to confess my faults and throw myself upon her mercy. For a moment, the impulse was strong upon me to do so, but I had the good sense to perceive that this would be rather rash under the circumstances. I hoped that she loved me, but, as yet, she had not told me so. Moreover, there was no hurry—but I resolved to consider it seriously.

“Miss Wymore,” I said earnestly, “do you mean to say that if you had loved a man, situated as my friend was, and that man, moved by a sense of duty toward God and society, had denounced the scoundrel who was trying to lead him deeper into crime, meekly and uncomplainingly accepting all consequences to himself, even though his duty should lead him to the penitentiary or the gallows—would you—could you love him still?”

“I had not meant to say what I might do; but, since you ask me, I will try to tell you as well as I can. As I said just now, I am a woman and therefore—I add the therefore as a concession to the prejudice of the sterner sex—therefore I am neither very

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logical, nor very theological—if you can pardon the frivolity of the remark. I have read, in a very old book, that to serve God and keep his commandments is the whole duty of man. A very concise moral creed, but it is mine. Very simple, but there are heroisms in it—the noblest heroisms possible for me to imagine. I suppose every girl has pictured in her mind the man whom she calls her hero. At least it has been so with me. My ideal is the man who serves God and keeps his commandments; and of course he is capable of all the heroisms, and sacrifices, and martyrdoms, that are implied in that precept. Now, you see, your question is answered. It answers itself when you ask me whether I could love my hero if, when he comes, he should be able to rise, in the face of the greatest distress and peril, to my very highest ideal of manhood. I must not boast before I am tried, but—I think—I am sure, if he had courage enough to go to the scaffold, I should be proud to stand by his side in that supreme hour of his disgrace and—triumph.

“You are a noble woman,” I said—I could not resist the impulse—“the noblest woman I know—and the sweetest. I beg your pardon, Miss Wymore, but—I think—you must have known long ago, that I loved you.”

Perhaps she had seen it, but I hardly think she was prepared for the declaration at that moment. I



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took advantage of her confusion to tell her all that was in my heart concerning her. I am not without eloquence, I hope, and this was a theme to bring out whatever powers of speech I possessed. The story of my love was a true story, as I call heaven to witness. I could see that she was not angry at my presumption, but when I pressed her for an answer to my pleading, she said:

“Did you tell me the name of your friend—your dead friend who was so unfortunate?”

“His name was Michael Carmichael,” I said. I had no time to consider my answer or I might not have been so imprudent.

“Are you sure?”

“As the Lord hears me!” I said.

This is not a novel, but a history. It is not my purpose to give the reader a

“ melting tale
Of two true lovers in a dale.”

The details of a love scene are all right in a novel, but I have never met, in real life, many men and women who were willing to rehearse, for the benefit of the general public, this one tender act in life's drama. A low, sweet voice is an excellent thing in a woman, as some wise man has said; and when a woman confesses her love for a man, it is hardly ever in loud

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words. Therefore what she says is not designed for the edification or amusement of the public.

At her father's door we parted. I could tell what happened when she bade me good-night, but I will not. On my way home I paused once more on the bridge and looked down into the quiet water—and at the trees and the falling leaves. I uttered aloud, I hardly know why, the words of the Ancient Mariner:

“O let me be awake, my God,
Or let me sleep alway!

Then and there I awoke. My beautiful dream fled; and it did not come back. For I had, in truth, deliberately closed my eyes to much that was hideous and perilous in my position. There had been a moment when, if I had told the truth, I might still have won Judith's love, for she was of a generous and loving nature. But how could I, before she had confessed the secret of her heart, while the question of whether she would accept or reject me hung in the balance, so to speak—how could I throw my evil past into the other scale? Now that I had let the opportunity pass; now that I had won her love; now that she believed in me—now it was too late. Then the cruelty of it, even if I could go and confess, and still hold her true to me. I knew, better than she could know, that the betrayal of my secret would mean sure death to me. I had somehow persuaded myself

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that I might go on with this present scheme, and that, once safely through it, I could marry Judith. I thought she need not know. But now my reason, so long dormant under the spell of my ardent love, awoke and demanded an answer to certain questions:

How can a dead man marry, O fool? Is not the theory of your death an essential element in this worthy little enterprise? Are you not here, courting the acquaintance of all these people, so that, when you disappear, your absence may create a sensation in the community? Is it not an essential part of your plan that there may be a large number of these good people to identify your body, or the one supposed to be yours, in order that the whole affair may be as open and free from all suspicion as possible? How will you manage to be dead to all the world and alive only to Judith—unless you can make her your accomplice? You know her better than to hope that she will become your partner in crime. Perhaps, even now, she might marry you, if you should confess at once—being a woman in love. But Gilbert? And Beulah? And Gopher City?

I crossed the bridge and went over among the trees where I threw myself down on a heap of leaves and groaned aloud in my anguish of spirits. I cannot describe the suffering of that hour. There were moments when I thought of suicide and moments—I con-

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fess it—when I thought of murder. Why not kill that devil incarnate and be safe? But then there was Beulah. I have no maudlin sentiment about me. The death of such a man as Gilbert can never, under any circumstances, be a calamity to society; but it would be worse than foolish to kill him and let her live. And how could I kill a woman? And how could I kill either with safety? In this world there is no uglier deed than homicide—even when justifiable. It is so hard to explain and so difficult to conceal. Moreover it was wrong. So I spurned the idea, not because it was dangerous, but because it is forbidden by the laws of God and man. I put away the thought and prayed; and as I prayed the tears came—I wept like a child.

In the hotel office, when I returned, there was a light burning. I lay down upon a small cot, behind the counter of the waiting-room, and went to sleep, my face still wet with tears.

A DARK MOTIVE.

CHAPTER VIII.

A DARK MOTIVE.

The ringing of the breakfast bell woke me. I was about to get up when I heard the voices of Gilbert and Beulah in conversation. They were in a small room that opened out of the office. At first I had no thought of listening to what they said, but I soon discovered that I was the subject of the conversation. In reply to some remark made by Gilbert, Beulah said:

“What time did he come home?”

And Gilbert replied:

“I do not know. When I went to bed, at half past eleven he had not come. I believe he did not come at all.”

“He is not in his room. I passed his door on my way downstairs. The door was open, and his bed had not been disturbed. He may have slept at the printing office.”

“Nonsense. There is no bed at the printing office.”

“A man in love does not care for such trifles as beds—so I have read. He might sleep on the office table.”

“You think it a bad case, eh?”

“So bad that it is time for us to take the matter in

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hand. Dear me, what a shrewd fellow you are—what a wonderfully shrewd fellow! But your fault as a spinner of spider's webs is that you sometimes spin them too fine. A pretty stroke of policy, no doubt, to make a church member of your protege, but it seems to me you overlooked the chance that he might take to religion in earnest—and he came near doing so."

"Maybe. But do not forget that I was around all of the time; and remember also that I know my man."

"Very well. I advise you to continue to be around—the closer the better. He is infatuated with that girl. You give a good deal of attention to psychological problems off and on. Let me ask if you have ever tried to calculate the combined effects of love and religion on the poetical and voluptuous temperament of our dear brother George William?"

"Poetical and voluptuous be hanged! Why, the man is as cold-hearted and selfish as Satan himself!"

"Which is why, no doubt, you imagine he will be the very man to forego the gratification of his passions out of regard for the interests of other people."

"I imagine no such thing—not for one moment. But we have it in our power, you see, to rein him in whenever we wish. What can he do?"

"He can bolt. It is not altogether a one-sided affair, that little romance. The girl is in love with him,

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let me tell you. I beg you to remember that our darling brother George is no fool. He will invent some pretext to satisfy her, and then—then, some fine morning, they will ‘come up missing.’ Then what becomes of your fine investment?”

“My word! I had not thought of that. You are a jewel, Beulah, a diamond of the first water! Have you considered what we ought to do?”

“Yes, but we must go to the dining-room now. Come to my room after breakfast. I have a plan which is warranted to succeed.”

As soon as they were gone, I got up and went out into the street. I walked about a little while and then re-entered the house, going directly to the dining-room. Gilbert hailed me cheerfully.

“Hello, Georgy! Getting into bad habits, my boy! Not been in the lock-up, have you?”

Some of the boarders laughed and one or two of them made facetious remarks on what they were pleased to call my “bad case.” While I could have dispensed with these witticisms very well, I was wise enough not to show my annoyance. I merely said I had been working late and had slept in the office rather than disturb the people at the hotel.

“Rather late in the season for that sort of thing, my boy,” said Gilbert; “nights are too cool. Come home to bed next time, no matter what time it may be.”

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I hardly know how I got through the morning's work. My mind was in a strange state of confusion. As soon as I could, by the liberal use of the shears, satisfy the printer's demand for copy, I locked the door of my private office and sat down to think.

"He can bolt." These words of Beulah haunted me. Here perhaps was the idea I wanted—the clew which might lead me out of the labyrinth. Yes, my darling loved me—that much was certain; and since she loved me, she would at least hear with patience any proposal I might make. Beulah had suggested that I might be equal to the invention of a pretext for an elopement. I would not need a pretext, because the truth would be better than any fiction I could invent. I had only to tell her the facts, and let her see the peril in which I stood and, sooner or later, I could make her see the necessity of flying with me to Canada or Mexico—anywhere so that I might have peace and safety the rest of my life. "Give me ten days," I said to myself, "and I will balk your scheme which is warranted to succeed. You shall learn how dangerous it is to push a brave enemy to the point of desperation. Only give me ten days."

There was a knock at my door. I opened it and admitted Gilbert. He sat down in the chair I offered him and said:

"My dear brother, you are not looking well. Is

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there anything the matter. You have hardly eaten anything for several days and this morning you barely touched your breakfast. Have you anything against the cook? Only say the word, and I will discharge her at once."

This speech must have sounded well to the printer, for whose ears it was doubtless intended, the door being now wide open.

"It is not the cook," I said, "I am not well."

"Just as I feared. And here is Beulah complaining of poor health. I believe you have both been working too hard. What you need is an outing, and I have come to propose one for your joint benefit. It is only a few miles to the Iowa line, and Beulah has never been in Iowa. Have you? No? Think of that now! Never in Iowa! Beulah thinks it would be a shame not to go there as it is so near. It is only twenty-five miles to Pinktown, the county seat of Meadow county. So I have hired a good team, with a two-seated carriage, to take us there this afternoon; we can come back to-morrow."

I suspected at once that this proposed trip to Iowa was, in some way, connected with Beulah's infallible plan to separate me from Judith, but I could only stammer out some tame objection about the danger of leaving the hotel to run itself."

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"Never mind the hotel," he said. "I have arranged to leave it in good hands."

"But I cannot possibly leave the office," I said. "To-morrow is press day, and—"

"Never mind the office. I have already spoken to the printer. He used to run it before you came to Janeville, and he cheerfully agrees to run it until you return. Besides," he added in a low tone, "we must have some talk—about the scheme, you know; and this drive will insure the utmost privacy."

I saw that any further objections on my part could only have the effect of arousing his suspicions.

It was the middle of the afternoon when we arrived at Pinktown. On the way Gilbert discussed the beauties of the autumn landscape—quoted poetry about the "Golden-rod," and the "Aster in the wood," and the "yellow Sunflower by the brook,"—but he never said a word in the way of consultation about our plans.

We went to a hotel and engaged accommodations for the night. Beulah went immediately to her room, and Gilbert invited me to accompany him in a walk about the town. We went to the court-house square. The building stood in the midst of a beautiful grove of maples. The leaves were falling from the trees, but the weather was mild and it was pleasant in the open air. We sat down upon one of the benches in the yard and Gilbert began the conversation by saying:

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"I am sorry to say, Beulah is much dissatisfied—though, at the same time, I cannot blame her."

"Beulah," I said, "Beulah is—"

"Yes. Very much dissatisfied, poor child. You see, Beulah is an orphan and, although I am her brother, her very devoted brother, she—well, a brother is not—is not everything, you know."

"But I don't see—"

"No, of course not. How should you? I didn't see until she placed the matter before me in its true light; and that shows how short-sighted men are as compared with women. Beulah has called my attention to the fact that she has no sort of pecuniary interest in this enterprise—none whatever—not a cent. True, the policies are payable to the estate of George William Ward. And that would be sufficient, in the event of your death, if we were actually your brother and sister, because Beulah could come in with me as your next of kin. But in the present deal we have no covenant with her. Not a word about her share. She has been overlooked—ignored, as she puts it. A great injustice, of course. Also a great blunder."

"But," I said, "half the investment was mine. I understood that if we succeeded, half the profits would be mine, the other half yours. If you wish to admit Beulah to one-half of your share I have no objection."

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But surely she is not afraid her brother will wrong her."

"Certainly not, but poor dear Beulah, woman-like, has views of her own. You must know that, in affairs of this kind, accidents are possible. I myself am not much afraid, but it is no use to deny that they do happen. They happen every day, somewhere. If we should be killed, or be sent to jail, or be hung, she would be quite alone, without a dollar in the world, with nobody to take care of her. It may even be worse. If things go wrong she might be arrested and sent to jail as our accomplice; she may even be convicted of conspiracy to defraud. Think of that! And all this risk without a dollar to come to her—except what her brother might be disposed to give in charity! Outrageous!"

"Am I to understand that she demands a third share of the proceeds?"

"No, no—not at all. She is very reasonable. All in the world she asks is that you shall marry her. As your wife—"

I sprang to my feet.

"Great God!" I exclaimed. "I'll see you both in Sheol first!"

Gilbert rose and confronted me. I had often read about the devil in a man's eyes. I now for the first time realized the meaning of this phrase.

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"Am I to understand," he said slowly, "you are offended when I suggest that you shall marry my sister? Do you consider that a gentleman of your antecedents has a right to be indignant when he is told that a good woman is willing to marry him? My soul! It seems to me Beulah might well hesitate to marry you. As for you—"

I sat down again and covered my face with my hands.

"Gilbert," I cried, "have some mercy. I am engaged to Judith. I love her—try to realize what that means—I love her! Only last night I told her so. And she loves me, has promised to marry me."

Gilbert sat down beside me and was silent for a while. When he spoke again it was in his habitual, cold, sarcastic manner.

"My son, I was about to call you an idiot, but I am loth to use harsh words, under the circumstances. At the same time, it would be a gross outrage on common sense to call you a wise man—would it not? I leave it to you."

"I am not going to contest the point," I groaned.

"Why have you asked Judith to marry you? Have you not known all along that you could not marry her?"

I made no reply. What could I say?

"Have you not considered," he went on, "that you

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must become dead to everybody in Janeville, Judith included, if our plans are to be carried out?"

"Since last night I have considered nothing else."

"Well then, you—Oh for breath to utter what is like thee! Why did you allow yourself to drift into a love affair at such a time?"

"Drift is the right word," I said. "I drifted into it, never thinking what the end would be."

"Even so. And in admitting your cowardice, you virtually admit that marriage with this girl is impossible, if you are to keep your engagements with me; therefore, you must have known in your heart that you were about to betray either me or the girl. Well, it is not for me to ask whether you have considered the consequences of betraying Judith—that is your affair; but I wish to know whether you have considered the consequences—all the consequences—of playing false to me?"

"I have not failed to consider some of them," I answered bitterly.

"Then, no doubt, you have perceived that these consequences—one of them, at least, will be separation from the girl—whether you go on with me or not. Whether you go forwards or backwards, you lose the girl—or she loses you, which comes to the same thing."

"Gilbert," I said, "let me out of this thing. I will

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give you every cent I have in the world—there will be enough to pay you back—all you have put into this scheme.”

He got out a pencil and note-book.

“Let me see,” he said, with the air of one about to make an intricate calculation, “how many thousand dollars did we expect to clear? Have you as much about you as would pay my share of the profit?”

“You know I have not,” I replied.

“Have you any friends who would lend you the money? Perhaps some of your former clients at Gopher City might help you.”

I was silent. He put the note-book back into his pocket, folded his arms across his breast, and said, as if addressing the trees:

“I do not know why I am so patient with this young man? Has he given me medicines to make me love him? I know very well, he is aware that there is, for me, a very easy, simple way out of this difficulty. In a word where accidents of a fatal nature happen almost daily—but lead us not into temptation!”

This was a threat, of course; and coming from such a man, I well knew what it meant. The purport of it was that, if I did not comply with his wishes, he would kill me in such a way as to make my death appear accidental. Then he would draw the money for which my life was insured. He allowed me only

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a short time to consider his words. Rising to his feet, he said:

“Enough of foolishness! Let us come to the point; and the point is this. Will you marry Beulah? Yes or no?”

“But I do not love Beulah.”

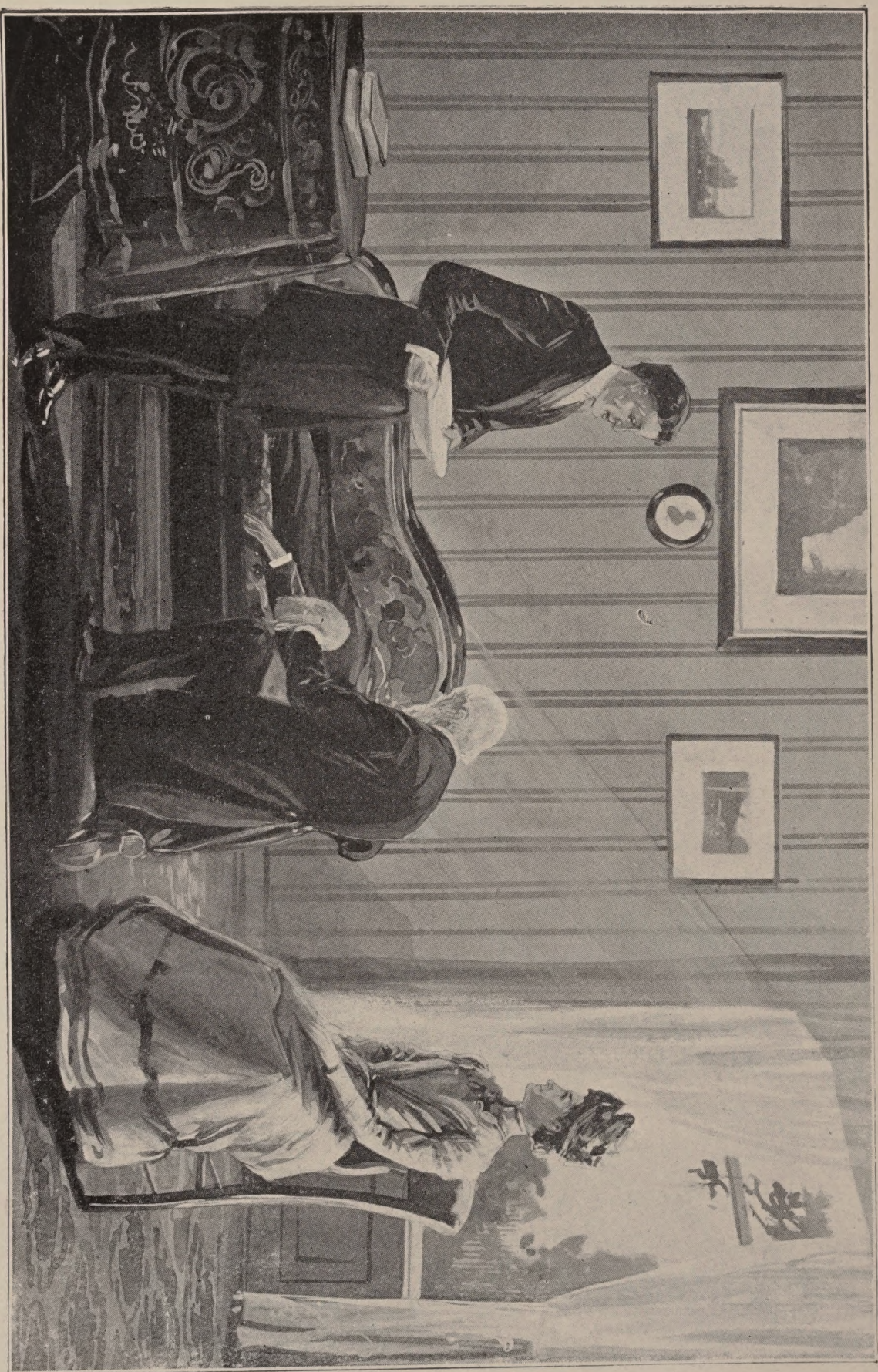
“No? Well, it may be that Beulah does not love you. This will be what the novel writers call a ‘marriage de convenience’.”

“But suppose—God help me! Suppose I agree not to marry Judith. Suppose I promise to give her up—never to see her again?”

“Nonsense. What would a pledge like that be worth? We are not fools enough to take any chances with a man in love. Come, you must know very well that this is merely a common sense measure of self-defense on our part. We are practical people, Beulah and I. Besides, what says the great bard?

‘The friends thou hast, grapple them to thy soul with hooks of steel.’

That is all we want to do—all in the world—if an Iowa marriage can be called a hoop of steel. When you are married to Beulah we will have a hold upon you, my dear young friend, that will keep you from harming yourself or us. I tell you, things have come to such a pass that there is no other way—or, rather,



“WHY, YOUR WIFE IS THE BETTER SOLDIER.” — PAGE 149.

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but one other way. It is for you to decide whether you prefer to become a dead man in theory or a dead man in fact. You see I am plain with you."

"But when," I said, anxiously, "would this marriage take place?"

"In an hour—or even in less time, if you are in a hurry. That is why we are here. I suppose the bride is making ready in her room at this moment. We can procure the license in a few minutes. From the number of church steeples I should say there can be no lack of parsons here."

"But Beulah and I pass for brother and sister in Janeville."

"Yes, but this will be a private wedding. Moreover it is time for you to disappear; and that will simplify matters."

I will not dwell upon the further details of this unhappy business. The very recollection of it maddens and sickens me. I was in the net of these human spiders, they would not let me go, and I could not escape. O, it was horrible, horrible! Gilbert procured the license—he did not have the generosity even to pay the license fee.

"It will be a dollar," he said, "and the preacher ought to have about ten dollars—eleven in all. There will be some other expenses, hack-fare, and so forth.

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Better hand me about fifteen, and I will look after everything."

We obtained the license and the address of a minister, after which Gilbert procured a carriage and horses from a liveryman, our own team being tired with the long drive. I waited inside the vehicle while Gilbert went into the hotel for Beulah. I bestowed one despairing look upon her as she entered and seated herself by my side. There was not the ghost of a blush upon her ghastly face, not a sign that her heart beat faster by so much as one additional throb per minute. Horrible! As we drove to the house of the minister, I thought of Judith, and felt that if the grave were between us we could not be more effectually severed than we must be by the act of that hour. We entered the preacher's house. A happy, peaceful home, no doubt, but for me its door might have borne upon its lintel the words read by Dante over the gate of hell, "Who enters here, leave hope behind."

"Do you, Michael Carmichael, take this woman, etc., etc." I recall but little of it, distinctly. I suppose I made the right responses at the right time. At last I heard the preacher say, "Husband and wife;" and I remember nothing more until I found myself lying upon a couch with the minister bathing my face with cold water. Beulah was seated in a chair with

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her hands folded in her lap, and Gilbert was holding a basin for the preacher.

"Come," said the minister, "you must not let your nerves get the better of you in this way. Why, your wife is the braver soldier. See, she is perfectly composed."

So, in fact, she was—perfectly calm. I got upon my feet and Beulah said in her deepest tones:

"It is time to go."

Beulah and I went outside and waited upon the porch, while Gilbert paid the preacher his fee and obtained his signature to the marriage certificate. As the man of God was filling the blanks in the certificate form, I heard Gilbert say:

"Quite a nervous person, my brother-in-law. But then this is a very old attachment. Known and loved each other from infancy, you might say. Good many unfortunate hindrances. Parents on both sides opposed the match. When he heard the words, 'man and wife,' and realized that the dream of his life was fulfilled, he just couldn't stand it—keeled him over like a duck. Always was an emotional creature. Will make none the worse husband for that, I should say."

I recall the further events of that day as a man may recall the dreams of a fever. No attempt was made to keep the marriage secret in the town, for I was married in my true name. I recall the staring and grin-

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ning of the waiters at the supper table. I have a dim recollection of a pitying look bestowed upon me by the chambermaid, when she bade us good-night at the door of our nuptial chamber.

We returned to Janeville next day. During the three days that followed our return, I kept my bed, sick in body and mind. My wife waited upon me without the slightest demonstration of love or aversion. She made it her business to see that all my wants were supplied, and she kept all visitors from me, except the doctor. On the second morning she entered my room with some chrysanthemums in a vase.

“A young lady sends you these,” she said, “a Miss Wymore. She sends her best wishes for your recovery, and hopes you will be well enough to attend prayer meeting.”

I turned my face to the wall and drew the counterpane over my head.

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CHAPTER IX.

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The sight of the small package of newspapers which lies on my desk as I write, fills me with emotions of a very painful kind. The papers are yellow with age, for I have kept them long; yet it has been many years since I had the courage to unfold one of them. Now, however, in order to refresh my memory, I must go over their contents once more, for they contain detailed accounts of my disappearance from Janeville. I open, first, my old paper, the "Janeville Banner." How the past comes back to me as I see once more the old, familiar head-letter, the long-primer news type, and the half page "ad" of "Jones, Happy & Huddleston." I am given a conspicuous place, under a quarter of a column of "scare-head"—as we called it in those days. Here is the beginning of the article:

"It is not often that anything happens to break the serene, soul-satisfying monotony of life in our little town. From one year's end to another, the most startling things recorded in these columns are weddings and funerals, varied occasionally by protracted meetings and elections of town officers. But within the last few days an event has occurred which is certainly a record breaker in the way of sensation. The oldest inhabitant can remember no time so fraught with

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excitement since the dark days of '61. We allude, of course, to the sudden, strange and mysterious disappearance of George William Ward, last Thursday evening. The facts, as given below, have been carefully gathered, and may be relied on."

The editor then mentions as a matter of possible significance, that I had been in poor health and, seemingly, in low spirits since my return from a short visit to Iowa. He gives a particular account of my movements up to Thursday of the week following my return from Pinktown. On the evening of that day, there was a church social at the hotel, and he relates how, and why, I left the room where the guests were assembled, to procure a glass of water for one of them, but failed to return. It appears that this caused some surprise and some comment, but no particular uneasiness, as it was natural to suppose that some customer had called me to the office on some matter of business. The editor then tells what happened next day:

"At seven o'clock, as usual, the writer went down to the printing office. As it was press day, we locked up the forms and began to run off the weekly edition of the BANNER. About nine o'clock Charles Ward came in and asked if we had seen George that morning. When we told him no, he seemed to be troubled, and related the incidents of the evening before substantially as we have given them. He said that on one other recent occasion George had slept out of the house and hence his absence had not caused much alarm at home."

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Then he tells how the excitement gradually spread in the town, and inquiries were made at the stations on the railroad above and below Janeville. He tells that an examination of the hotel premises disclosed the glass near the pump, and that the Negro boy, Sam, had seen me with the tumbler in my hand, going out to the pump on the evening of my disappearance.

“Charles said that none of his clothing was gone except what he had on when he left. His hat was gone, but he had not taken his overcoat although the weather was cool enough to make a heavier garment desirable if a night journey was contemplated. The night-man at the depot declared that no person whatever had been about the station that evening after the 9:30 train.”

The editor next mentions the fact, learned from my brother Charles, that I had the very foolish habit of carrying a considerable sum of money about me—several hundred dollars.

“Charles said that while his brother was a very amiable young man, he was in some things, very obstinate. He said the boy was neither a drunkard nor a gambler and had no low associates, but it was possibly the fact of his carrying this money about with him might have become known, in some way, to evil disposed persons. In which case the young man might have been decoyed somewhere and murdered for his money.”

The editor tells how the excitement continued to spread through the village and from there to the surrounding country. He says that on the second day the

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town was filled with farmers who assisted in searching the place and its vicinity. Cellars, stables and other buildings, even wells and cisterns were examined. Every pool in the little stream was dragged, for miles above and below Janeville. Every grove, thicket, orchard and clump of weeds where a body might be hid, was examined, and this rigid search extended for miles and continued throughout the entire days of Saturday and Sunday. A careful description of my person was sent to the police at Omaha, Kansas City, Atchison, Leavenworth, St. Joseph and Des Moines, and a liberal reward was offered for any information that would lead to my discovery. Then follows a graphic account of the grief of my brother and sister.

"The sister almost worshipped him, and Charles has often been heard to declare that the young man was more like a son to him than a brother. Charles is pale and haggard, evidently wearing himself out in his efforts to find George, and his distress is obviously increased by the almost complete prostration of the sister. Miss Ward is at this writing confined to her room and can hardly be persuaded to see her physician. The hearts of the people go out in sympathy to this bereaved brother and sister in their hour of trial."

Then follows a careful description of me for the guidance of all who might seek the reward:

"When last seen, Mr. Ward had on a black cutaway frock-coat, black pantaloons and white waistcoat. He wore a pair of number seven congress shoes. Mr. Heintzelman,

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the shoemaker, says the inside of the heel of the left shoe had been slightly worn away, and had been straightened up with some bits of leather. Mr. Ward had on a freshly laundered white shirt, standing linen collar with white string tie. The collar was fastened behind with a clasp button and in front by separable gold buttons. He wore number 11 linen cuffs fastened with gold buttons; a peculiar looking yellow stone was set in each button and one of these stones was cracked, the fracture extending across the stone, but not quite through the center. A spring on the other button had been repaired by the local jeweler who informs us that the evidences of his work can be seen on examination. The missing man usually carried on his person a small pocket comb in a leather case, a small pair of tweezers, a pocket knife with buckhorn handle, and a printer's composing rule. It is believed that he had on his person a leather belt containing about \$750 in paper currency. Also he may have had about him some letters addressed to himself; or there may have been some other document which might assist in his identification."

The editor then gives what he intended to be a very accurate pen-and-ink portrait of me, giving height, weight and colors of eyes and hair. As it does me gross injustice, in one or two particulars, I omit it here—especially as that part of the description did not prove to be of the least value in the end.

Of course, the story got into the daily papers of the larger towns. As such things were rather more uncommon in those days than they have since become, these journals gave a good deal of space to the affair. Reporters came to the town and interviewed all sorts

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of people about it. They printed all the facts they could obtain about me, my relatives, my personal habits, my birth and parentage. Gilbert was very cordial and friendly with these gentlemen of the press and, in spite of the fact that he was almost crazed with grief and anxiety, he had time to give them a good deal of very interesting information.

Of course, the fact that my life was heavily insured and that the beneficiaries in the event of my death would be my brother and sister, was soon discovered. Yet, so far as Beulah and Gilbert were concerned, nobody could find a single peg upon which a suspicion would hang. Here is an extract from a St. Joseph morning paper which will show the status of the insurance question:

“Charles Ward, brother of the young man who disappeared from Janeville last week, was seen by a reporter of the —, at the Francis Street station yesterday. Mr. Ward was here in conference with the chief of police on some matter relating to his brother's disappearance. The reporter asked him if he had seen the statement in an evening paper to the effect that the missing man's life was heavily insured. “I have not seen the paper,” he said, “but if the statement is there it is perfectly correct. When my brother received his small share of our father's estate he insisted on repaying sister and myself the expense of his education. We refused the offer, firmly but positively telling him that as we had never married and never intended to, we had adopted him. We told him people did not charge their own children for such things. George is a very sensitive boy

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and he never seemed quite satisfied. At last he proposed to have his life insured for our benefit, and, after vainly combating the idea for a long time we consented. But we made one condition. We refused to have ourselves named in the policies; we persuaded him to insure for the benefit of his estate—his next of kin, we told him, would be his heirs in any case. We hoped indeed that he would marry, in which event the money would go to his wife—or his children.”

“Did your brother leave a will?”

“We found a paper in his desk which purports to be his last will and testament, but we have not opened it. A shoemaker named Heintzelman, and the printer in his office say they attested the signature of a document, which he told them was his will. But they know nothing of its contents. It will not be opened unless we are fully satisfied he is dead.”

“If his death is established, and it turns out that you are his heirs, will you demand payment of the policies?”

“I know of no reason why we should not. The companies had his premiums. No doubt they would be much surprised if we should refuse to press our claims. One thing is certain, when the claims are presented, there will be no trouble about the payments, for they will be perfectly clear of any taint of suspicion.”

Enough of the newspapers. The reader will doubtless want to know how my disappearance was managed. It was, in reality, a very simple matter. While the people were dragging the river and searching barns and thickets, I was snug in the apartment sacred to the grief of my supposed sister. Alas, what a shameful thing to relate! The hotel had, it is true,

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been pretty thoroughly overhauled in search of clues by my anxious friends. My own room had been carefully searched, time and again, but Beulah's chamber was held sacred from intrusion. Sometimes they heard her moans and lamentations through the closed doors, so they always stepped lightly, and spoke in whispers when they found themselves near that darkened abode of sorrow. Poor sister, she had been regarded as cold and silent, by no means in the habit of airing her feelings for the benefit of the public; but now it was seen how, under pressure of this dreadful calamity, the barriers of self-restraint were all broken down; the mask of indifference had fallen, revealing the tender woman behind it—the devoted sister with torn and bleeding heart. Pah! I blush to record the miserable, ghastly farce!

Of course Gilbert had admittance to the room. He always entered or left with a grave, anxious air, walking as if he were picking his way among eggs. Sympathetic listeners outside could hear his voice from time to time, as he gently remonstrated with his stricken sister, admonishing her not to give way to despair, and assuring her that he had not lost hope of finding their lost brother. At such times I sat with my chair so placed that no inquisitive eye could see me through the keyhole, or get a glimpse of me when

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the door was opened. What a grim, hideous, scandalous comedy!

And how well it was acted! But for the fact that these pages will not see the light while I live, I would not dare to write the ugly details of it. It was not until noon of the second day that Beulah could be induced to partake of food. Then a waiter was admitted with a tray containing such delicacies as might tempt the appetite of a person who had little heart to partake of nourishment. Most of this was sent back untasted, for we had a private store of food, provided in anticipation of the event. I was in the closet while the waiter was in the room. The admission of this waiter, and the doctor, later in the day, was a stroke of policy for which Beulah is to be credited. The fact that two entirely disinterested persons had been in the room would effectually prevent suspicion in that direction. We even allowed the closet door to remain partly open while the physician was there, so that he might see the interior of the place—all except the part behind the door—which opened inward. There was no danger that a respectable man like Dr. Lantz would take it into his head to rummage the closet. The doctor prescribed quiet, for one thing, and Gilbert saw that this part of the medical man's orders were strictly carried out. He had just lost a brother. Could anybody blame him for not wishing to lose his sister, also?

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For three weary days I remained shut up with my beloved wife. I was afraid to move, afraid to speak, almost afraid to breathe, trembling at every footstep that approached the door. At midnight of the third day Gilbert came to the room and reported that it would be safe for me to leave. I had the same disguise I wore at El Agua. Weeks beforehand we had purchased a suit of clothes for me in St. Joseph, concealing them in Beulah's trunk. All my handkerchiefs, shirts and underclothing were new and marked with initials of the name I was to bear while in concealment. The reason for this was that we feared the woman who did the washing for the hotel might miss my own clothing from the laundry list. All the garments worn by me on the evening of my disappearance were packed in a valise along with my other belongings.

There is, or was at that time, a freight train from the north due in Janeville at 1:45 A. M. As this train carried passengers, some one from the hotel was usually there to meet it. Sometimes Gilbert attended to this duty, and hence his presence there with me, if observed at all, would excite no comment. We were very careful in leaving the house, but once outside the greatest danger of detection was over. It was a dark night, not raining, but cloudy. There was not much chance of meeting any of the townspeople at that hour.

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In any case, as I was well disguised, any one meeting us must have thought that Gilbert was escorting a guest to the train. There was a light burning in the window of the station and we had to cross the rays of this light on our way to the upper end of the platform; but the night-man was fast asleep on a table, and there was no one else about. When the train came in, the engine stopped at the water tank below the station house. We had to walk along the track some distance to reach the caboose. I shook hands with Gilbert and climbed aboard. I was the only passenger. Nothing in this whole business so tried my nerves as the waiting for that train to start. There was a long period of backing, and bumping, and jerking, and pushing—but at last the welcome signal sounded and we were off.

I must not weary the reader with a circumstantial account of my experiences during the seven months that followed my flight. I went from Janeville to St. Joseph, from St. Joseph to Lexington, then to Sedalia, and from there to a small village within forty miles of Springfield. As I had picked up a little knowledge of the printer's art, I got employment in a printing office, so that at the end of seven months, with strict economy, I actually was better off financially than when I left home. On the twenty-eighth day of April, I received a newspaper enclosed in an ordinary

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stamped wrapper. On the inside of the wrapper, I found this: “(Iaax) (ia) (apecqe) (ex) (kjga).”

This was a cipher message from Gilbert and it meant, “Meet me at El Agua at once.” Thus it happened that, on the evening of May 1, near the hour of sunset, I found myself once more on the porch of the log-house near El Agua. As I raised my hand to knock, the door opened, and Gilbert stood before me. He shook hands cordially, drew me inside, and shut the door.

“Have been here a little more than a week,” he said, “about ten days, in fact. I left your wife well; she sends her love; had to leave her in Janeville to look after the hotel. I am supposed to be in Denver investigating the case of a sick man who was thought to resemble you.”

“Yes,” I replied, “I have had access to many newspapers from all parts of the country, so that I have been able to keep posted about myself. My dead body has been found and identified in San Francisco, Cincinnati, Baton Rouge and East St. Louis. People who knew me intimately have seen me, alive and well, in Galveston, Boise City and Toronto.”

“Just so, and I even spent fifty dollars to have a dead man exhumed in Wichita—he really did look like you. Of course that means twenty-five dollars out of your pocket, but the money was well spent, since that

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little move must have set all minds at rest as to the genuineness of my belief in your disappearance."

"Well," I said, "you sent for me, and here I am. What next?"

"We will have a bite of supper next. As I live here in the strictest privacy, I never have a fire until after sundown. If you will draw the blinds carefully, I will light a lamp and make a fire."

I do not know how he had managed to supply himself with provisions without making his presence known in the neighborhood. In fact, I never quite understood his El Agua environments. It may be that he had friends in the neighborhood.

"I suppose," he said, as he seated himself in an arm-chair, after supper, "there is no business in the world so unsatisfactory altogether, to the man who practices it, as the prophecy business. Have you ever looked into that?"

"I have never given the subject a moment's thought," I said.

"I expect it is all good for the prophet, 'Lest he o'er high and proud should turn, cause he's sae gifted.' I believe that whenever a genuine prophecy is uttered, the fulfillment never comes about in the way the prophet expects. You see, he is seldom permitted to give more than the principal facts, the bare outline, you might say. If ever he attempts to fill in the shad-

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ing—to go into details—he ‘gets left’—as you newspaper men say. If you take the trouble to study the question, you will find this is invariably true. For example, I made a prophecy last summer, as you may remember, about young Mr. Lindsay.”

“I have not forgotten it,” I said. “I have had little else to think of these last ten months.”

“There it is! Ten months! I said he would die in six months; it is now ten months, and he has not been dead more than three days. I said he would die of heart disease; he did not die of heart disease at all.”

“Heavens and earth!” I exclaimed, a horrible suspicion coming into my mind, “Has the man been murdered?”

“No—no, I should say not—what made you think of it? I do not think there is any evidence, any conclusive evidence, that is to say, that he was murdered. But you shall read the facts.”

He produced from a pocket of his coat a copy of the *El Agua* “Fountain” of that date, still damp from the press.

“It cost me ten cents in cash and no end of trouble to get this, but it is worth all it cost. I had to go away round to the place where we left the mail coach, when you first came out here. I had to wait a long time before I saw a country boy going into town. I paid him to bring a paper on his return. It took almost

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the entire afternoon—in fact, I had only just returned when you came.”

“I did not care to ask him why he took so much trouble to get that particular paper, but I have always regarded that as a very suspicious circumstance.

I have that ominous paper before me now. The very sight of it is so hateful to me that I think I shall burn it as soon as I have made one or two excerpts. The editor tells, at great length, how one of “our grandest young men, Mr. Hamilton Lindsay, went forth to the green wood in the flower of youthful bloom and returned this morning, a corpse, in the bottom of Jack Harmon’s wood-rack.” He relates how, in consequence, “a mantle of deepest gloom has fell over our once happy community.” It appears that the young man had left his home for a day’s fishing on Pine creek, about five miles from El Agua. Not far from that stream he was seen, by a person whom the editor designates as “Uncle Billy Ham,” in conversation with a stranger—probably a visitor at the springs, out for a morning walk. The young man’s failure to come home had not caused his relatives much uneasiness, as they had reason to believe he would go to a neighboring town that evening. On the second morning a wood-hauler, named Jack Harmon, had found Mr. Lindsay’s buggy in the woods, and near by his horse was found tied to a tree, the harness re-

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moved. Further details are here quoted from the paper, with the understanding that I am not responsible for the literary style of the matter quoted:

"The mare had tramped the ground smooth and had eaten the bark off the tree as high as she could reach. Jack recognized her as the property of Hamilton Lindsay and he made up his mind to look round a little. They was some buzzards on a dead limb of a tree across the creek and he went over that way to see what they was after. A little ways down the river he came across a cane fishing pole lying on the ground. At that place there is a high bank composed mostly of rock and the top of this bank is twenty feet above the water and the bottom is about five feet back from the edge of the water. In the little strip of ground between the bank and the water's edge they are a good many good-sized rocks scattered about. Jack looked over the bank and saw a man lying down there among the rocks. He called the man but got no answer. It was not easy to get to him because ten feet up the river, and twenty feet below, the water comes right up to the bank, and it is ten feet deep at both places. By holding on to bushes and vines, and putting his feet in cracks and bulges in the rocks a man can get down if he has nerve enough. Jack had the nerve, but it took him all of a quarter of an hour to get down. The man proved to be Hamilton Lindsay. A pocket revolver was lying near him on the ground. Just over his heart the clothing was burned and blackened with powder. It was found, at the inquest, that every rib on one side of his body was broken. His left arm was crushed and the left leg was broken in two places. All alone with no prospect of help coming, crazed with pain, the unhappy young man had evidently killed himself to get out of his misery."

Then follows an account of how the body was re-

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moved from its almost inaccessible position. Also an account of the proceedings before the coroner. Here is the verdict of the coroner's jury:

"We, the jury, find that the deceased, Hamilton Lindsay, came to his death from a fall from a ledge of rocks on Pine Creek, and also by a gun-shot wound in the region of the heart, inflicted by himself, on or about the 28. day of April, 18—, at —county, Missouri."

Something of the horror with which I read the article must have appeared in my face, for, as I put down the paper, Gilbert asked me if I felt sick.

"Sick!" I exclaimed. "Yes, sick at heart! I seem to be going deeper and deeper into the bottomless pit. Every additional step downward brings me face to face with new horrors!"

"You have my sympathy, I am sure. But where, may I ask, did you seem to be going before you read that article? To heaven?"

I made no reply to the brutal taunt. He waited for a while and then said:

"Well, go on."

"I have no more to say. Or, if I have, language is too feeble to express it."

"I think you really have more to say. If you cannot express it as well as you wish, express it as well as you can. You had some questions to ask, I am sure. Ask them now—or 'hereafter forever hold your peace.'"

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"I will hold my peace," I said. "For God's sake, hold yours, as far as this business is concerned, if you do not want to drive me mad!"

"So be it. I really had some curiosity to know what you were about to ask; but the secrets of a comrade should be respected. Is it not so? Shall it be so with us?"

"With all my heart," I said.

"Very well. Now to business. This unfortunate young man will be buried to-morrow—so the paper says. We should attend the funeral or, at least, the burial. It may be a little risky, as far as I am concerned, but nobody knows you. We must study the scene of our future operations, to prevent mistakes."

"Where is the cemetery?"

"Half a mile north of El Agua and about two and one-half miles south of here, as the crow flies—between here and El Agua."

"In that case why should we go near the church where the funeral services will be held? The paper says the church service will be held at three o'clock in the afternoon. At that hour the people will be at church, and the graveyard will be deserted, so that we can easily find the grave. Or, if the grave-digger and his assistants are there, we can watch the place from a safe distance. All we want, I suppose, is the location of the grave."

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"I believe you are right," he said, after considering the matter a few minutes.

"But tell me," I said, "why either of us should care who sees us? I am a stranger and, as you have lived here before, there could be nothing strange about your coming back."

"This is a very inquisitive, suspicious old world. On the day when Mr. Lindsay left home a stranger was seen in his company—and I am a stranger, comparatively speaking. I may not resemble that particular stranger, but, possibly, I may. I know something of that old Uncle Billy—what's his name. If he should take it into his obstinate old head that I resemble that man, he would cackle over it like a hen over a new-laid egg. I have no time to waste answering fool questions. Moreover, there may be people here from Janeville. Remember that El Agua is a health resort."

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CHAPTER X.

PREPARING THE EVIDENCE.

From a safe hiding-place among the trees which grew close to the graveyard fence, we witnessed the burial of the unfortunate young man. When the people left, we made a close inspection of the place to make sure of finding the grave again at night. There was no road across the hills to our house, but as we were afoot, this made little difference to us.

When we started home I observed that the weather was about to change for the worse. When we got to the southeast corner of the field, we came into a sort of cow-path which followed the fence to the house, a quarter of a mile away. Across the clearing we had a good view of the sky to the northwest. A long, heavy, wicked-looking cloud was coming from that direction. At the outer edge, it was rough and ragged, but back of the jagged border it looked as smooth and hard as polished granite. It had a greenish tinge, which imparted to it a singularly venomous look. Smaller clouds—fragments of the main body seemingly—went before the mass, turning somersaults. It was not later than six o'clock, but the woods were growing dark. Just as we reached the big road

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which passed our door, a great column of dust swept down the highway, and the sand and gravel stung our faces like shot. Fortunately the house was only a few yards away, and we ran for its shelter, our bodies bent at an angle of forty-five degrees. I was a little ahead of Gilbert, and I actually ran over a man on the porch.

Not a time to ask questions, especially as questions would have been useless in that awful outbreak. The roar of the wind and thunder was deafening, and the air was full of leaves and branches torn from the trees; one great limb of a tree, thick as a man's body, fell with the heavy end on the edge of the verandah. We did not lose any time getting inside when Gilbert unlocked the door, but it took the combined strength of all three to close the shutters. Inside, it was dark as if at midnight; the stanch old log structure trembled under the shock of the tempest, but endured it bravely. The wind soon spent its force; the rain, however, continued to fall.

"Sorry to inconvenience you, gentlemen," said the stranger, "but any port in a storm, you know. Gliddens is my name—agent for the White Star nursery of Stella Junction, Illenoy. What you Mis-soo-reans call a fruit tree pedlar. I seen that storm coming and hunted for shelter right quick. I don't believe I was ever any gladder than when I see this house, or any

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sorrier than when I found it shut up and the folks away from home. As I didn't have no time to hunt any further, I had to make the best of it right where I was. I tell you I was mighty lonesome for a few minutes. I felt real pleased when one of you gentlemen tromped on me, out there on the stoop."

As we could not well turn the man out in the rain, we invited him to stay all night. We entered the sitting-room, lighted a lamp, and had a good look at our visitor. A muscular, spare man of about my size and weight. Bright, intelligent brown eyes. No beard on his chin or upper lip. He wore a suit of dark gray clothes and carried a small oil-cloth bag swung over his shoulders, like a school-boy's satchel or a soldier's haversack. The bag contained his specimen books—as we learned when he offered to sell us fruit trees, after supper.

Gilbert, as the man in possession, told him he had no wish to buy trees, being only a renter; but we looked at his pictures with much interest. Gilbert stood behind the stranger's chair and looked over his shoulder. Several times he made me a sign which I could not at first comprehend. He would draw the fore-finger of his left hand between the finger and thumb of his right. Finally I remembered Beulah's remarkable story of the drover, the farm-hand, and the nice old gentleman. Sure enough, there was a

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little white seam between the stranger's thumb and forefinger.

I understood at once, of course, that this was a spy; and the discovery was far from pleasant, all things considered. Yet a brief reflection convinced me that he was not particularly concerned about me, since he had evidently been upon Gilbert's track long before I came to the neighborhood of El Agua. It was easy for me to believe that Gilbert had, at some time or other, done something to bring the bloodhounds of the law upon his track; yet I never learned what specific act of wickedness it was that brought him under the notice of Mr. Gliddens. As to Gliddens, I am not morally responsible for what happened to him, though in strict construction of law— But never mind. He was, by profession, a hunter of men, and, as such, must have taken into account the perils of the chase as well as its pleasures and profits.

I really think he understood his nefarious business very well, and he might have proved a formidable foe to any man but Gilbert. I have the idea that he retired to rest, that night, well pleased with himself as a prince of "Old Sleuths." Perhaps he looked forward to the time when his name should be embalmed in the pages of a detective novel. For, on some pretext of settling a point of theology concerning which he and my companion had a heated argument before bed-

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time, he actually got his intended victim to agree to go with him to El Agua in the morning—to consult some book of reference.

When they set out on this errand, after breakfast, Gilbert undertook to show him the shorter route across the hills. When they were gone I decided to take a nap, because, for various reasons, I had not slept well during the night. I do not know how long I slept—two hours, it may be. I was aroused from my slumbers by a very disagreeable odor in the house. I got up and went into the kitchen. I found that Gilbert had returned, had lighted a fire, and was burning something in the kitchen stove. I now believe the disagreeable odor came from Mr. Gliddens' oil-skin bag, although I could not swear to it. When I entered, Gilbert was taking some papers from a large pocket-book with a red Morocco cover. He stuffed the papers into the stove. When he saw me, he said:

“Queer about the villain in a novel, isn't it? He always hides the stolen will, or other documentary proof of the rightful heir's title—or the marriage certificate—hides it, or carries it around with him. Then somebody finds the important document, whatever it is, and there is trouble for the villain and triumph for his victim. Yet, in an age when matches cost only a cent a box, it is so easy to burn anything made of paper, and it is such a plain, every-day, common-sense

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thing to do, that anybody but a villain would do it at once. What a fool a villain is!"

Could Gilbert have known how the fates were mocking him at that moment! He was destined to dig his own grave—figuratively speaking—that very night!

"Where is the fruit-tree agent?" I asked.

"Some people would answer that question one way, some another. I suppose an Armenian heretic, like you, might say that the question of Mr. Gliddens' whereabouts must depend upon how Mr. Gliddens has lived. I am not so rash as to say anything like that. He may have been of the elect."

How little I dreamed, at that moment, of the time and place where I should hear the same question propounded, to be answered to all intents and purposes in the same way. In this case, the cold-blooded levity—nay, the downright brutality—of the answer, made me sick. He looked at me steadily for a moment, and said:

"Well? Any more questions?"

"No," I said.

"Quite sure?"

"Quite sure."

"And you are satisfied not to know the contents of this?" and he held up the pocket-book.

"It is nothing to me," I replied.

"Discreet young man! Now to business. It is yet

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early in the day, but there is much to be done, and that it may be well done, there should be a division of labor. We must have a team and horses, and it will be my business to see to that. I will have to go around to the Schneidervale road and catch the mail coach. I know a man over in that country who will let me have what I want and no questions asked. He has already accommodated me in that way once, and that recently, which will explain to you the presence of certain things in the cellar. I cannot get back before dark, but then we will have time to feed the horses and give them a couple of hour's rest. Meanwhile there will be work for you. Between here and the graveyard the woods are open enough to admit the passage of a wagon among the trees, but there are some hollows to cross. Go out, this afternoon, and mark a way for us—mark it so carefully that we will not miss it in the dark. We must get the wagon right up to the graveyard fence, as near the grave as possible. Take the whole afternoon if necessary, and make sure of your landmarks.”

A beautiful afternoon it was. Only a few traces of yesterday's storm could be seen. A broken branch here and there, or the shattered top of a tree, attested the violence of the wind. The heavy rainfall of the day before had made little impression on the stony soil. In some of the low places there were heaps of

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twigs and leaves where they had been drifted by the water. Ferns which had stood by the side of little brooks were lying flat upon the ground, but the brooks had subsided once more into little tinkling rills, running, clear as crystal, among the stones. I think I have never seen anything so exquisitely beautiful, as the woods were on that May afternoon. Deep beds of fern in the hollows, star-eyed daisies, great masses of violets, millions of dandelions, verbenas, clusters of pink and purple phlox, wonderful fairy nooks, carpeted with moss and flecked with sunbeams, broken by the tender green leaves above.

It is not to be supposed that I let the beauty of the scene win my thoughts entirely from the duty I had to perform. I succeeded, not without some trouble, in marking out a practicable route for the team, exploring the way carefully clear up to the back fence of the cemetery. My work finished, I did not linger long in sight of that lonely, last resting-place of the dead. I went back into the woods some forty or fifty yards, and being a little fatigued, sat down upon a ledge of rocks with my back against a tree, to meditate upon the lovely world about me. So beautiful—so delightful! I remember thinking that if there were no sin, no devil, no cold-hearted, selfish, scheming men like Gilbert, this earth would be paradise, indeed.

A gentle breeze from the southwest bent the

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branches and made the young leaves shiver with a pleasant sound. Sometimes a stronger gust would tear up from among the young grass blades some old, dead leaves of last year, driving them before it down the hill into the soft, green twilight of the bush-clad hollows. Almost behind me, as I sat with my back to the graveyard, there were three or four trees growing close together. One of these was a small oak, with wide spreading branches arching over until the ends almost touched the ground. A little summer whirlwind—a sort of fairy tornado, came dancing up from the southwest. It dashed into the midst of this clump of trees and out again, coming directly toward me. The noise it made caused me to turn my head and I saw something dark driven before it. Within a few feet of me the miniature cyclone left the earth and went off, humming like a swarm of bees among the tree-tops. It left the dark object within easy reach of my hand. It was a man's hat, and I knew it in a moment for the one worn by the man Gliddens when he left our place that morning. Under the circumstances, this was an awful thing to happen. I guessed at once what was hidden there under those trees, and my first impulse was to get away from there. I think I should have acted upon this impulse, but for the uncanny suggestion of something supernatural in the incident. An absurd notion, no doubt, but it seemed to

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me the spirit of a murdered man was in that whirlwind, sending this mute messenger to summon me to the spot, that I might bear witness of the crime, denounce the criminal, avenging the innocent victim. Even now as I recall that strange incident, I am conscious of a superstitious thrill. I felt myself irresistably drawn to the place. Like St. Anthony, "I could not choose but look."

I examined the hat, but found no evidence that would indicate violence. It was a common, soft felt hat. I recalled its owner as he left the house that morning, a jest upon his lips, satisfied with himself and all the world. Nerving myself for the sight which I knew I should see, I went up to the place and drew aside the branches with my hand. A pretty little natural arbor, carpeted with moss, in the midst of which, with face upturned, with glazed, half-closed eyes that seemed to stare at the blue sky through the branches, lay all that was mortal of our late guest. In the middle of his forehead was a round hole with little blue powder specks about it. I suppose the bullet must have passed through his head as the moss beneath was stained crimson. The pockets of his trousers were inside out, and his waistcoat was unbuttoned. He had certainly been searched after he had been killed, but his watch was still ticking in his pocket. I do not think he had met his death at that particular spot. He

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had probably been dragged there by his slayer. I do not know the details of this tragedy. I never questioned Gilbert on the subject, and he was not the man to volunteer information. Poor Mr. Gliddens! he must have known that life was at stake in the game he was playing with one of the most hardened and desperate of the world's scoundrels, but I confess I have always felt sorry for him.

It was about eleven o'clock that night when Gilbert and I left the house on that awful errand, the memory of which has ever since been revolting to me. The night was clear, but there was no moon, and the journey was slow and tedious. Gilbert drove, and I walked ahead of the horses, with a lighted lantern. We reached the graveyard a little after midnight. We took the horses from the wagon and tied them to a tree at some distance from the place where we were to work. Then we took the wagon and backed it up against the fence as near the grave as possible. Of course we had not come unprovided with such tools as we needed. Gilbert took one of the shovels and pried one of the upper boards from the fence, so that, when the wagon wheels were against the bottom boards, the hinged end-gate of the wagon would hang, when let down, inside the yard.

It would be of no use for me to pretend I was not nervous and uneasy, although my reason told me there

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was little danger of interruption at that hour. There was no public highway near the cemetery; the road which led to it ended at the gate on the south side. It was not a well-kept place of interment. Even in the daylight it was a dreary, forlorn-looking spot; in the night it was horrible. Gilbert blew out the lantern and we set to work. Of course we made no more noise than was absolutely necessary, but sometimes when the shovels would strike one of the small pebbles mixed with the dirt it seemed to me that the sound must be heard in El Agua.

If there was anything wrong with my companion's nerves I did not discover it. When we had cleared out the pit to the boards which covered the vault where the coffin lay, he assisted me to get out. Then, after removing the boards, he took a screw-driver from his pocket and removed the screws from the lid of the box containing the coffin. He then loosened the screws in the lid of the casket, so that it could be removed when necessary. Getting out of the grave, with my assistance, he climbed over the fence and went out to where the horses were, and brought back the driving reins, proceeding in everything with a deliberation that nearly drove me wild. He went into the grave once more, taking the reins with him.

Further details will be useless. We got what we came for, and deposited it in the wagon. After a very

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brief rest from our exertions I was anxious to fill the pit and get away as speedily as possible, but Gilbert said, with brutal levity that was awful to hear:

“Wait. An empty grave is of no use to anybody and may cause confusion on the resurrection-morning. I have a tenant for this one—if you will kindly help me to put him in possession.”

I knew what he meant, of course, and, while I did not approve of his speech, I saw that his plan was wise and prudent, for many reasons. And so I helped him to deposit the body of his victim in the grave of Hamilton Lindsay. We then filled the pit, leaving as little sign of our visit as possible.

I need not worry the reader with the ghastly details of our work after we reached home. Only the essential facts need be stated. Gilbert had improved upon the trunk idea. He had caused to be made, in Kansas City, a box of galvanized iron, with a closely fitting lid fastened by a hasp and padlock. He had himself inclosed this case in a rough pine box, made in the same town, by another workman—such a box as is ordinarily used in the shipment of dry-goods or clothing. He had shipped it to Schneidervale and, by means of the same team we had used to convey the body to the house, had brought it home, concealing it in the cellar. He had also had the forethought to provide a small charcoal furnace, such as tinnerns use,

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with a supply of charcoal, and some soldering irons. When we had sufficiently completed the ghastly work, he lighted the furnace and soldered the joints where the lid came down. We dressed the body in the clothes I had worn on the night of my disappearance from Janeville, and buried the dead man's garments in the cellar. Then, after resting one day, at ten o'clock of the following night, we lifted the box into the wagon and left the place.

It now remained to get over the difficulties incident to the shipment of our package. Whenever the nature of the freight should be discovered there would be an effort, of course, to trace the case back to the point of shipment—ordinarily an easy thing to do. The smaller the station from which it had been billed out, the easier to connect the shipper with the shipment; and yet there were reasons why it must be sent from an out-of-the-way place. Seven miles north of Schneidervale is the little town of Gorm. At this place there are about seven houses, including the railroad office. There is no night-man at the depot and, for that reason, the box could not be billed out before morning. To appear there with a team in broad daylight, would be to court a critical examination by the entire population, children included. It was of the utmost importance to us that Gilbert should not be seen in connection with this transaction, because it would be ex-

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tremely awkward if the shipment should ever be traced to him.

The problem was solved in a very simple manner. We drove boldly into Gorm, at two o'clock in the morning, when every soul in the place was in bed and asleep. We unloaded the box upon the platform and drove leisurely back to Schneidervale. We parted in the outskirts of the town, Gilbert going to the place where he had procured the team, while I went to the depot and bought a ticket to Gorm. The northbound passenger train, due in Schneidervale at 5:20 A. M., carried me to Gorm in twenty minutes. I left the car on the side opposite the platform, and instead of entering the station, went to a little restaurant across the street and ordered breakfast. After breakfast I went across and arranged for the shipment of the case to Kansas City, prepaying the charges. It would be easy to claim the package there, and easy to re-ship it over some other line to its final destination. We argued that, in the larger business of the freight offices there, this one transaction would be as a drop of water in the sea, hence there would be little chance of any clerk remembering the shipper. I shall not forget the scare the agent at Gorm gave me before it was all arranged. He got a pot of lamp-black, or some other mixture, and was going to mark the box with the name of the consignee and the place of destination. I

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begged him to let me attend to that matter, as I was particular about such things. Without a word he handed me the pot and brush and went inside. I got a bit of cardboard at one of the stores, wrote the address on that and nailed it to the case.

At Kansas City this label was carefully removed by us and destroyed, and the case was re-shipped to St. Brandan, consigned to Yeatts Yattsinghouser. This name was invented by Gilbert.

“There can be no one,” he explained, “of that name in St. Brandan, or anywhere. It would not do to select an ordinary name, or even a possible one, for there might be some such person, who might get the box. Which would not do at all. There must be many queer names in the directory of a great city like St. Brandan, but surely no such name as ‘Yeatts Yattsinghouser.’ ”

I may as well say here that if the reader consults his map as to the location of St. Brandan, he will not find what he seeks. My suppression of the real name of the place to which our freight was sent may seem, to some, like an excess of legal caution, but the habits of a lifetime are not to be overcome in a day. The reader may, or he may not, be able to guess the true name of the town; but a guess has no standing in the courts.

Of course, we separated as soon as this business

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was finished. Gilbert returned to Janeville, and I returned to the printing office in the southern part of the state. The year which followed was an anxious one, for me at least. It was about the middle of the May following, that I received a little circular, in an unsealed envelope. The circular announced a sale of unclaimed freight and express packages, on the first day of June, at the offices of the J. K. & Z. railroad in St. Brandan. On the back of it, written in pencil, were these words:

“Your loins girded, your shoes on your feet, your staff in your hand.—Exodus, xiii, 11.”

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CHAPTER XI.

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On the first day of June I was in Kansas City, in a furnished room on Campbell street, wearing, of course, my old disguise. Without delay, in a manner previously agreed upon, I communicated my address to Gilbert. That first day of June was to me a day of mental disquiet, so that I did not sleep well until long after midnight. Hence it was later than usual when I went to my breakfast. I took my meals usually in a small restaurant on Main street, almost half a mile from my room. Owing to the lateness of the hour, not many people were in the place. I sat down at the end of a lunch counter. Behind me, between me and the door, were a number of tables. At one of these tables were a couple of elderly gentlemen leisurely finishing their meal. While I waited for my modest order of toast and coffee to be served, I heard one of these men say:

“Of course, fashions in crime, as in other things. Originality in murder is no more the rule than originality in dress. A few men and women, with remark-

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able taste in dress, rule the world of fashion. In literature, a Samuel Johnson or a Carlyle will, each in his generation, determine the style of sentence, or the mode of expression, which is to prevail in the world of books. So crime has its leaders, its Alberts and Eugenes, its Johnsons and its Carlyles. A man hangs himself over a barrack-yard gate; immediately five other men, one after the other, hang themselves in the same place, in the same way. In London a villain murders some women in a peculiarly horrible manner; at once he has imitators in every great city in the world, who butcher women in the same way, as nearly as possible. Here is this thing we have just read in the papers. Since that English scoundrel killed his friend and hid the body in a trunk, the trunk mystery has become the fashion,—with a few variations, as in this case.”

What his companion answered, I do not know; nor did I care to hear what he said, for I felt sure that Gilbert’s plan was maturing exactly as he intended.

I swallowed my coffee, paid my bill, and left the place. At the corner of the street I bought the morning papers and hurried to my room. I locked the door and unfolded the “Times.” This is what I saw on the front page:

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GHASTLY FIND.

REMARKABLE PURCHASE OF A
ST. BRANDAN MERCHANT.

Horrible Contents of an Unclaimed Freight Package,
Purchased at Auction by Mr. Goldschmidt.

Evidences of a Horrible Crime Committed, Presum-
ably, in the Neighborhood of Kansas City.

“St. Brandan, June 1—For a little more than a year a very innocent looking box has been lying unclaimed in the freight warehouse of the J. K. & Z. railroad, at Cottonwood and Ninth streets. The box appeared to be an ordinary affair, made of undressed pine boards. The only thing which, to a casual observer, might make it remarkable was the name of the consignee, written on the outside with an ordinary marking brush, ‘Yeatts Yattsinghouser.’ The railroad company’s records show that the case was shipped from their Kansas City offices early in May, 18—, a little over a year ago. No freight charges were prepaid, and no storage fees have been received at the warehouse here. A railroad company may sell unclaimed freight packages which have remained in their hands unclaimed for six months. The J. K. & Z. people, however, have annual

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sales of such stuff, in order to save cost and to prevent expensive mistakes. Sometimes it happens, as in this case, that goods are held in their possession for more than a year. One of the annual sales occurred to-day. The packages were, in this instance, sold unopened, at auction, to the highest bidder, the purchaser taking his chances where there is any doubt as to the nature of the contents. Usually the nature of the stuff sold is sufficiently indicated by labels on the outside, and in the bills of lading, and hence the buyer is able to give an intelligent guess as to the value of the goods offered. Even where there is nothing to indicate the character of the contents of a package, there are always people enough willing to risk the experiment of buying 'a pig in a poke.' Therefore, when the case bearing the unpronounceable name of 'Yeatts Yatt-singhouser' was offered, there was even more than the usual competition among the buyers present, because it was a large, prosperous looking box, weighing over 200 pounds. In fact, when it was knocked down to Mr. Goldschmidt, of 476 South Third street, most of his competitors seemed to wish they had raised that gentleman's final and successful bid of \$11.55.

"A drayman delivered the box at the purchaser's place of business about four o'clock this afternoon. It was something near an hour later when a short,

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bald-headed Hebrew gentleman came rushing out from the front door of No. 476 South Third street, shouting, or rather screaming: 'Bolice! Bolice! My Gott! Bolice! Bolice! My Gott! Bolice!'

"Sergeant O'Brien and Patrolman McGinnis happened to be in the neighborhood, and they hurried to the place whence the outcries came. The man appeared to be in a frenzied condition of mind. He continued to shout 'Bolice,' after the officers arrived. He became measurably coherent only when Officer McGinnis threatened to 'run him in.'

" 'My name vas Goldschmidt!' he shouted. 'Id vas murder! Id vas a svindle, My Gott! I sue dot r-r-railroat combany! Gott in himmel! Dere vas a cor-r-rups in dot box!'

" 'What box? What box, ye furren lunatic?' said McGinnis.

" 'Come inside,' said the Sergeant, 'till we see who ye've murdered.'

"Goldschmidt keeps a second-hand store and his stock, if not large, is varied. In the rear of the building is a dingy back room, lighted by a very dingy window which looks out upon the alley between Willow and Rush streets. In the middle of this room was the case purchased at auction that day by the tenant of the premises. It appears that when the box was delivered, it was carried to this room by the dray-

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men. As soon as he was left alone with his purchase, Mr. Goldschmidt set to work to find out what he had bought. He removed the top boards and found, very much to his surprise, that the wooden box was only an outer covering for an inner case of galvanized iron, which appeared to be fastened by a hasp and padlock. Among the varied articles of his stock in trade, Mr. Goldschmidt easily found the implements needed to open the lock. He admits that he was feeling very cheerful about this time, as he felt sure a box so carefully secured must contain something of great value. After picking the lock he made the further discovery that the joints of the iron case, where the lid came down, had been carefully soldered. Being an economical man, he was anxious not to spoil his property. He therefore procured a cold chisel and mallet and set to work patiently to loosen the joints. He worked nearly an hour in this manner, as he says, 'Singin' away all der vile, to myselluf, like a meadow-lark in spring, my Gott!'

"When the policemen entered the room, the box was open. It contained a corpse in a sitting posture, the upper portion bent forward, the knees drawn up, so that the head almost rested upon the knees. In the space between the upper half of the body and the sides and lid of the case were some old pieces of rag

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carpet. In the spaces between the box and the lower portion of the body, pieces of patchwork quilt had been stuffed. The legs were bound together, above and below the knees, by strong pieces of cord, of the kind used in tying express packages. The officers, after hearing Goldschmidt's statement, arrested him, as a precautionary measure, although it is not probable that he will be held, as he bears a fair reputation in the neighborhood where he lives. The corpse was, of course, delivered to the coroner.

"The body is that of a young man who, in life, must have weighed about one hundred and fifty pounds. Hair and moustache, reddish brown; small hands and feet; teeth smooth and even; color of eyes not easy to determine—probably dark gray; white shirt and linen collar, both marked G. W. W.; white waistcoat with stump of lead pencil in one of the upper pockets; piece of watch chain attached to button hole of waistcoat; number seven shoes—one slightly worn at the heel—had been mended; linen cuffs, fastened with buttons with yellow stones—one button cracked; handkerchief of linen—cuffs and handkerchief marked G. W. W. Contents of pockets: pair of tweezers, knife with buck-horn handle, printer's rule, and a pocket comb. The coat worn by the dead man was a black frock; the pantaloons were black. In the breast pocket of the coat some letters were found, but they were so thor-

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oughly rotted as to be illegible—except that the word ‘George’ could be deciphered on one envelope.

“Undoubtedly the man had been murdered. A careful examination by the coroner disclosed the fact that the left arm was broken at the elbow. The left leg had sustained a compound fracture; several ribs on the left side of the body were broken. Just over the heart was an ugly hole evidently made by a pistol bullet fired at close range, for the clothing above the wound had been on fire.

“The crime was certainly perpetrated in Kansas City, or in its immediate neighborhood, as the case was shipped from that point. The care taken in the preparation of the body for shipment proves, beyond a reasonable doubt, that the murder was the work of a gang who had carefully planned every detail in advance. Of course, the shipment was made to prevent any discovery of the dastardly deed until its perpetrators could make good their escape.”

The ‘J—’s’ account of the affair did not differ from the above in any material matter. Each paper had some editorial comment on the mystery. I forget which political party was in control in Kansas City at that time and so I forget which paper it was that had the scorching editorial, blaming the mayor and the police judge for allowing crimes like that to go unpunished.



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When the 'S—' came out that afternoon, it had no additions to the St. Brandan end of the sensation, but it had worked the Kansas City end for all it was worth—which was not much. Among other people interviewed were the people at the freight office. Nothing came of it. If the extraordinary name of the consignee had made any impression on any clerk, or other person whose duty it was to write it down anywhere, the impression had been speedily effaced by the necessity of writing some other more or less remarkable name immediately afterwards. What is a queer name, more or less, in a country with a miscellaneous population like ours? But there was one article in the evening paper which interested me much. I quote it here.

"A 'S—' reporter met a man this morning, near the junction of Main and Delaware streets, who may have a clue to the St. Brandan box mystery. The man has what he calls a 'general repair shop' in the basement of a building on West Ninth street. He appears to be a compound of blacksmith, gunsmith, tinner, gas-fitter and cabinet maker. He occupies two rooms of the basement. The outer room contains a litter of odds and ends—gas-pipe, scraps of iron, broken furniture, and specimens of tinware out of repair.—In the other rooms, where a gas jet burns even on the brightest days, is a work bench, a small anvil, a charcoal

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furnace, and other implements of the proprietor's calling. The owner of this shop is, in all probability, the man who made the iron case found in the box at St. Brandan. More than a year ago, as far back as February, 18—, the man believes, a man came into the shop and asked the proprietor to make an estimate of the cost of a galvanized iron box of stated dimensions. The only thing about the stranger that the workman remembers is that he was a 'hayseed-looking chap.' The outcome of the visit was that the proprietor made a case of galvanized iron, the material being purchased elsewhere by the stranger and delivered that day, he thinks, from an ordinary farm wagon. When completed, it was removed by the same man, in a conveyance of the same kind. The farmer had stated, for the benefit of the workman, that the case was needed as a sort of safe-deposit for clothes, the 'hayseed-looking chap' being a widower, much troubled with mice at home. The workman admits that the idea seemed a queer one, but he had set it down at the time to the well-known peculiarities of 'hayseeds' as a class. He thinks he might know his customer if he should meet him, on account of the 'Uncle Sam' whiskers he wore. The policeman who can collar this venerable granger will probably be very close to one of the perpetrators of this crime."

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I will remark here that no policeman was ever lucky enough to collar this venerable tiller of the soil.

I was now much interested to know what Gilbert's next move would be. The papers, next morning, fully enlightened me. I insert here a clipping from one of them.

"St. Brandan, June 2—A claimant for the body of the young man found in the box here yesterday has appeared. Since the news of Mr. Goldschmidt's ghastly discovery went out on the wings of lightning, the coroner and chief of police have received many telegrams from all parts of the country, asking for information on various points relating to the personal appearance of the dead man. Of all the messages received, so far, only one promises to throw light on the mystery. It was received by the coroner this afternoon, and reads as follows:

" 'Janeville, Mo., June 2, 18—

" 'Coroner, St. Brandan:

" 'Body found in box positively indentified as G. W. Ward, of this place. See newspaper files, October — to October —, 18—. Be there to-morrow.'

" 'H. C. WARD.'

"Readers of the 'J—' will no doubt remember the disappearance of G. W. Ward, a bright young newspaper man of ——county, in the fall of 18—. As the case attracted a good deal of attention at the time, it was easy to find accounts of it, with minute descriptions of the missing man, in the files of St. Brandan newspapers. It is interesting to compare one

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of these descriptions with that of the box victim, as given in yesterday's 'J—.' ”

Then follow, in parallel columns, the two descriptions. They need not be repeated here.

The crisis of our enterprise was now upon us; and it was a great comfort to me, when I saw that Gilbert was moving wisely—acting just as a bereaved brother might be expected to act under the circumstances. We had taken our final plunge and were now in for whatever must follow.

A letter, mailed in St. Joseph, reached me that evening. It contained a cipher message, the purport of which was: “Be in St. Brandan June 4. Dine at restaurant at No. 715 Aspen street. Watch for me, but do not address me there. Follow when I leave the place. Do not speak until I give the sign.”

I got to St. Brandan at eight o'clock on the morning of the fourth of June. I bought a morning paper at the station. By this time the case had become, to reporters and editors, almost ancient history, but the affair was, even yet, of sufficient importance to justify several headlines—on an inside page. Of all the newspaper articles which relate to this case, this one is not the least interesting—to me:

“Many a heart-rending scene has been enacted within the grim walls of the old morgue at the corner of L and Hemlock streets, but never one more pathetic

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than that witnessed there yesterday morning. Those who were present will not quickly forget it. A few minutes before ten o'clock two carriages drew up to the Hemlock street entrance. A heavily veiled woman, clad in mourning garments, accompanied by two gentlemen, alighted from the foremost carriage. The lady was Miss Beulah Ward, of Janeville. The gentlemen who accompanied her were her brother, Charles H. Ward, of Janeville, and the Coroner of St. Brandan county. The occupants of the second carriage were four gentlemen from Janeville, neighbors and friends of the Wards. At the door of the morgue the Chief of Police of St. Brandan joined the party and entered the building with them.

"Many people have expressed surprise at the remarkably good condition of the body. Although the flesh is much shrunken, the features must retain much of the appearance they bore in life. For some reasons, which physiologists may understand, the process of decay appears to have been arrested, and there is no offensive odor. The remains were exposed in the morgue in the hope that, even now, it might be possible to identify them.

"The party entered and approached the glazed screen behind which are the slabs for the bodies. Yesterday morning more than one poor wayfarer occupied a cot in this ghastly half-way house between sud-

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den death and the potter's field. There was the man who killed himself in a lodging-house near the levee; the man who was killed by a bar-tender on Sixth street; and the floater found in the river at the foot of Plum street. The party halted for a moment before the partition of glass which separates the living from the dead.

“‘Can you recognize any of these?’ said the coroner.

“With only a passing look at the other forms on the slabs, the entire party grouped itself in front of the body of the box victim. The men, who were a little in advance of the woman, seemed to hesitate, but the coroner's question had hardly left his lips, when the sister, with a sudden, agonized cry, started forward and tore at the woodwork of the glazed partition with her hands. The strong arm of her brother hardly restrained her from dashing herself against the screen.

“‘Let me go!’ she cried, ‘let me go to my poor murdered brother! I will go! I will go to him! I will go! O merciful God! He was our mother's darling—and they have murdered him! And she left him to our care—and this is the end of it! We have let him be murdered! O George, my poor murdered darling.’

“The agitation of the lady was so painful to witness

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that more than one eye among the spectators was wet. It was necessary to remove her. The brother and friends positively declare the body is that of George William Ward. On account of the sister's extreme agitation it was not considered prudent to let her see the garments found upon the murdered man until later in the day. Mr. Ward also declined to look at them for the present as he wished to accompany his sister to the hotel. The other members of the party saw the clothing and all recognized them as worn by young Ward on the night of his disappearance. One of these men follows the business of jeweler at Janeville. He asked to be allowed to describe the cuff-buttons before they were shown to him. He described them very minutely, and it was found that his description was correct in every particular.

"In the afternoon Mr. Ward and his sister returned. The lady was still much agitated, but was evidently making a great effort to face this most trying ordeal. Each of them carefully described the clothing before seeing it. Each of them described it correctly—the woman adding some little details which had been overlooked by the others. Down to the most trifling detail, her description was found to be correct. The body will be surrendered to the Wards to-day."

These quiet, reserved people were forever surprising

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their most intimate acquaintances. Beulah had always seemed to me as cold and passionless as an iceberg. If nature had endowed her with great personal beauty she might have been the greatest actress of her time, had she cared to seek distinction of that kind.

For economical and other reasons, I did not wish to go to any hotel. Having a good part of the forenoon at my disposal, I spent the time seeking a furnished room, suitable to my means. When I found what I wanted I paid a week's rent and took possession immediately, remaining there until the time came to keep my appointment with Gilbert.

He was seated at one of the tables when I entered the place, but I did not go near him. He gave me time to get my dinner before he left the restaurant, leaving the room a little in advance of me. On the street I followed him at the distance of half a block. He led the way until he reached the entrance of the big bridge over the river. He went out upon the structure until he was over one of the great piers in the middle of the stream. At each pier there is, on either side of the bridge, a triangular space where the roadway widens out toward the ends of the masonry. There the foot-passenger may stand aside, well out of the way of others, and enjoy a splendid view of the city, the river, and the shipping industry. If he will stand

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with his back to the iron railing, he may see all who cross from either side. At one of these places Gilbert waited for me. The position was well chosen, because, of course, no one could approach us unseen, and so no one could possibly overhear what we might say if we did not wish to be heard.

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CHAPTER XII.

UNEXPECTED DIFFICULTIES.

"It is a great pleasure to meet you," he said, as I came up, "but we must deny ourselves the luxury of shaking hands. The enthusiasm proper to all family reunions must be repressed here—for prudential reasons. Glad to see that you look well."

"You also appear to be quite well," I replied. "I think I never saw you looking better."

"As well, no doubt, as any man could hope to be, considering what I have gone through—since my brother disappeared last year. But you must be anxious for news of your wife, and it's very inconsiderate of me to keep you waiting—after so long a separation. By the way, have you read the morning papers?"

"Of course," I replied.

"Of course—of course. You would naturally be interested in the newspapers, being a newspaper man yourself, to say nothing of other reasons. Well then, you must know that your wife has just passed through a very painful and trying ordeal. She stood it all right, you know—bless her heart, she passed through the ordeal and still lives to remember it."

"Give her my compliments," I said, "and say I have

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no words to express my admiration of her conduct. I have an experience vouchsafed to few men, I think. I not only know how I shall look when I am dead, but I know how the mourners will act at the funeral."

"You know how you will look certainly. If all goes well, you may also know how your tombstone will look—if you care to go to see it. For I expect to do the right thing, in the monumental way, by my dear deceased brother. You may like to know that there will be a church funeral, at the meeting house, where your old friend, the Baptist minister, will officiate. I wish you could be there—and so does Beulah; but maybe you ought not to come, for fear of accidents."

"I do not want to be there, thank you. I believe I have had all the post mortem sensations I want. How are things going? Have you got possession of the body?"

"No, but it is all settled. I am to have an order for it this afternoon. I have nothing particular to say to you at this meeting, but I wished to show you this place. The truth is we must not meet too often, because the necessity of seeing each other occasionally may prove a weak point in our case. So far, I have no reason to believe that I have been watched—but we are dealing with shrewd people who are not to be trifled with. But if ever a conference is necessary, we can meet here without any danger of being over-

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heard, and with a fair chance of spotting any spy who may follow me. I will take your St. Brandan address, so that if I need you I can find you. If all goes well, I shall leave to-night for home on the St. Joseph and St. Brandan express. Be around the station, if you like, but do not come near our party. Just be on hand—in case of an emergency.”

We stayed there some time longer, perfecting our arrangements for the adjustment of all financial matters after payment of the insurance money. However, as that must be a matter of some uncertainty, for various reasons, the very best we could do was to devise means to communicate with each other as often as might be necessary.

And now I come to a part of this story which I should hesitate to relate if the facts, as I state them, could not easily be verified from the files of the newspapers of that period. Many times I have heard that fact is stranger than fiction. I used to be a little incredulous as to the truth of that venerable maxim, but that was long ago. I happen to be one of the men now living who have seen the proverb verified. At least, I have met with no story in fiction that is stranger than the cold fact with which I was face to face shortly after this interview with Gilbert on the St. Brandan bridge.

I went to the station that evening, but Gilbert and

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his party did not come. I went again next morning, but they did not appear. Then I bought a newspaper, which enlightened me as to the cause of their absence. Here is a part of what I read:

"There appears to be no end of sensation in the matter of Mr. Goldschmidt's now famous freight package. A sensational murder, a sensational mode of disposing of the victim's corpse, a sensational discovery of the same, and a sensational identification of the body. Now comes a sensational counter-claim, to be followed, it would seem, by a sensational contest for the remains in the courts.

"After the highly dramatic scene at the morgue, when Miss Ward recognized the body of her brother, everybody, the officials included, thought the question of identity was settled for all time. Arrangements had been made to turn the dead man over to the relatives. Mr. Charles Ward had arranged with an undertaker to prepare the corpse for shipment, and to provide all that was needed for the interment in the family burying ground at Janeville. At the last moment he was stopped by the coroner, who told him another claimant had appeared and that, under the circumstances, the shipment must be delayed until the matter is clearly settled."

The reporter for the newspaper had managed to procure copies of the telegrams which follow. The first was dated from a town in Kentucky, and was addressed to the coroner. It read:

"Body found in box positively indentified as that of G. W. Wickham, of this place. Proof positive. Hold remains. Relative now on the way to prove claim.

"JAS. T. WICKHAM."

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To this message the coroner had immediately replied:

"Body already indentified by parties in Missouri. Proof absolutey convincing. Shall surrender it to-day.

"LAWRENCE BRADY,
"Coroner, St. Brandan."

Shortly before three o'clock that afternoon the coroner received a visit from a lawyer named Scantling, who had in his hand a telegram addressed to the law firm of McQuirk, Connigle & Scantling. He showed it to the coroner. It was from James T. Wickham, and directed the firm to take legal steps to prevent removal of the body, giving also the First National Bank of St. Brandan as a reference. At the bank Mr. Scantling had learned that Mr. Wickham was a banker in the town from which the message was sent, and also that he was a member of a very old, very rich, and very aristocratic family of the blue-grass region. The reference might have added, I am firmly convinced, that he was a very obstinate, purse-proud, stiff-necked old man, who would go to law from a sheer love of litigation, caring more to win his point than for any principle involved. I have never been able to make up my mind fully on the question of this old man's honesty. There may have been some deep, wicked scheme back of the whole affair, but if he really believed the body was that of his nephew,

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I am thoroughly persuaded that he litigated the case, not because he loved his nephew, but because it did not comport with the family dignity to have one of the Wickhams interred away from the family burying ground. Throughout the whole affair, I never saw him exhibit the slightest sign of emotion. It is amazing to think of the trouble and annoyance which can be caused by one hard-headed old man with money to back him.

It was easy for the lawyer to persuade the coroner to await the arrival of the new claimant, who was expected to arrive that evening.

Here was an awkward complication. I did not believe the man from Kentucky could seriously endanger our possession of the remains, yet delay was dangerous to us for many reasons. Then, if this new claimant should really be able to throw doubt on the identity of the box victim, it might weaken our case in the courts, if ever we should be compelled to sue for our rights. The rascally corporations would be awake and vigilant. It was not to be supposed that they would miss any reasonably good opportunity to defeat our claims, or to force a compromise from us. It is characteristic of them that they are far more willing to receive a premium than to pay a loss.

Not strange that I should be restless and uneasy, anxious to do something, without knowing very well

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what. I went to my lodgings in the hope of finding there some communication from Gilbert. Finding none, I went, in spite of the risk, to the Coroner's office at the city hall. There I learned two things that interested me. One was that the new claimant had arrived. The other was that the coroner, who was also a practicing physician, had a private office in which he would give both parties a hearing at ten o'clock that morning. I procured the address and went to the place, arriving about thirty minutes before the time set. I was so fortunate as to find the official alone in his office. I boldly entered, and told him I was a private agent of the Golgotha Life Insurance Company of Boston; that our company had issued a policy on the life of a man named Wickham, of Elderberg, Kentucky, and that they had asked me to be present at the investigation. I also asked to be allowed to remain unseen by the others, if it could be managed. I suppose it was lucky for me that the coroner was very busy that morning—too busy to observe that I had not even introduced myself by the production of a business card. I am sure I do not know what I should have done or said, if he had asked me for any credentials to corroborate my statement. Anyhow, I got permission to remain in an inner room where, by drawing a curtain which screened

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the door of communication, I could see and hear without being seen or heard.

The new claimant, with his attorney, appeared first. Mr. Wickham was a tall old man, who wore a soft, wide-brimmed hat, and carried a gold-headed cane. He had dark, fiery, wicked-looking eyes, and he had a long beard which came almost to his waist. This beard was gray, for the most part, but there were threads of black in it. Similar threads were in his hair. He had long, bushy eyebrows, but the brows were black, with streaks of white. He limped when he walked, and he had a scar on his forehead. I have since learned that he had been a major in a cavalry regiment, in the time of the Civil war. His limp was the result of a bullet wound, received while obstinately holding an untenable position, contrary to the advice of his subordinates. The scar on his forehead was a memento of a heated political argument with a Yankee colonel, at Mobile, in the reconstruction days. Pride, obstinacy and a violent temper were written all over him, from the crown of his head to the soles of his feet. The moment I saw him, I felt we should have trouble with him. He claimed the body as that of his nephew, who had somehow managed to disappear, about the time I left Janeville.

Then there was the lawyer. I suppose I ought to describe Scantling, if only to satisfy the curiosity of

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those who may be interested in the study of female caprice. I had, at the time, an aversion to him—an instinctive aversion—I am sure; yet I am bound to admit he was not at all bad looking. He was a broad-shouldered man of medium height, had a prominent forehead, dark hair and dark eyes—very bright, alert eyes, which seemed made to see into, and through, things. He had a good mouth, a firm, square chin, and a Roman nose. Altogether, I am bound to say, a strong, clean-looking, fearless, capable man. On the day of our final hearing in court, I heard a woman say he was the kind of man to inspire people with confidence. I suppose she meant female people. I cannot say that he inspired me with confidence, at any time.

Gilbert, Beulah, and our friends from Janeville, entered shortly after the others. I found myself regretting that our side had no lawyer. As soon as they were seated, the coroner announced his readiness to proceed. He began by reminding them that this was in no sense a judicial proceeding. He had brought them there, face to face, because he was most anxious that no wrong should be done to any of the claimants. Altogether, he said, it was a very sad business, but, unfortunately, not so unusual as they might suppose. Cases of mistaken identity were common enough. Very few people, it seemed to him, were

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aware of the astonishing number of instances where people, in no degree related to each other by blood, have been found to resemble each other so closely as to puzzle their most intimate friends. He said that death sometimes seems to create resemblances where none were discoverable before. In the particular case now in hand, he had decided to ask the last claimant to give such description of the body as he could, before seeing it. Also he would ask him to try if he could identify the clothing and other articles, among a miscellaneous lot of similar articles. This was not because he questioned the honesty of Major Wickham, but because he wished to be fair to all concerned.

The lawyer said he trusted that no question of sincerity would be raised. He sincerely wished that his client might be mistaken in the matter, for then he might reasonably hope the nephew was still alive. No objection could be made to the very reasonable plan of procedure proposed by the coroner, but he wished to inquire if like precautions had been taken in the case of the other claimants.

The coroner informed him that the other claimants had published more than a year ago, in the newspapers, a very minute description of their brother—a description which had been widely published, and which he, the coroner, had seen and read before Mr.

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Ward and his sister appeared to claim the remains. Also there was, at that time, no other claimant.

Mr. Scantling then said that, with the coroner's permission, he would read another printed description, also published some months ago—relative to the missing Mr. Wickham. In the case of his client's nephew, the disappearance had not been quite so sensational as in the other. A rather commonplace affair, and a very ordinary one, unfortunately. A young man had left his home to seek his fortune in a Western city, taking along with him a considerable sum of money. One postal card, received by his relatives in Kentucky, contained the last information concerning him, from the date of his arrival in Kansas City to the present time. His friends, for a long time had not been uneasy, supposing him to be careless about writing; but at last an elder brother went to seek him. The results of the search might be gathered from the clipping he was about to read, being an extract from a Kansas City newspaper.

I cannot reproduce this extract, because I have no copy of it. It related the story of the young man's leaving home and the search subsequently made for him by his friends. They traced him to one of the leading hotels where he spent a couple of days after his arrival. It told that he disappeared from the hotel—leaving his trunk. It seems that his brother,

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after examining the clothes in his trunk, was able, from a previous knowledge of the young man's wardrobe, and from the recollections of the hotel people, to give a tolerably accurate description of the clothes he wore when last seen. Then followed a minute description of young Mr. Wickham's person.

I never understood until then how very unsatisfactory a written description of a man must be. In this case, item for item, the catalogue of young Wickham's personal peculiarities, if it be right to call them peculiarities, tallied exactly with the catalogue of mine.

But the thing which took my breath away, was the account of the young man's wearing apparel. It was a very complete duplicate of the list of my own personal belongings, to the minutest detail. Even the linen was marked with the initials G. W. W., and the cuff buttons were exactly like mine—except as to the flawed stone and the marks of repair. The reader need not take my word for it, the newspaper files of the time will, as I have said, amply corroborate my statements. If I were asked to explain it, my reply would be: "I cannot."

And now, for the space of an hour, one surprise followed fast upon the heels of another. When the coroner asked Major Wickham if his nephew would have a printer's rule in his pocket, the old gentleman said:

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"He might, sir. He edited a weekly paper in Louisville just before he went West."

Asked if his nephew had, to his knowledge a pocket knife, he replied that he had himself presented the young man with a knife before he went away. And he described a pocket knife with a buck-horn handle, exactly as the one I owned had been described in the papers.

Asked if he would undertake to pick out his nephew's wearing apparel from a lot of other clothing, he said that, if allowed to refresh his memory by consulting a memorandum furnished by his wife, before he left home, he thought he could select every article. When the coroner apologized for the strictness of the precautions he felt bound to take, the Major said:

"My dear sir, I can only repeat what my lawyer has said. You can do me no greater service than to prove that I am mistaken in this matter."

The coroner got up and drew aside a heavy curtain which screened a window recess on one side of the room, revealing a table on which were numerous articles, grim mementoes of other tragedies with which the coroner had been connected officially. Hats, coats, waistcoats, pantaloons, and other articles of male wearing apparel, some of which were old, some new, some cheap, others costly. Many of them were stained with mud or discolored by water. There were purses,

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handkerchiefs, pocket-knives, tooth-brushes, combs, lead pencils, eye-glasses, keys, pistols. I noticed there a set of false teeth, some poker chips, and a pocket Bible.

With great deliberation, Major Wickham selected from the heap of clothing every article found on the body of the man in the box. Moreover, he picked out the pocket knife and the cuff buttons. All these things he positively declared he recognized as the property of his nephew. At this point Beulah interrupted the proceedings.

“You wicked, wicked old man!” she cried. “Oh, Mr. Coroner, pardon me if I seem to be rude. But you must see that this is a vile conspiracy to rob me of my poor brother’s body. You know that all these things were positively identified by me, before I had even had a chance to see them. But thousands of people have seen them since. No wonder he wanted a list—a memorandum, to refresh his memory. A hundred people could have similar papers. It is shameful. It is all a conspiracy on the part of the insurance people. O Charles, tell them to keep their money, and give me my poor murdered boy!”

There was some confusion after this speech. Gilbert caught Beulah and forced her to sit down. The Major stared at her in speechless indignation. One of the men from Janeville said:

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“Right she is, by Jinks! Fire ’em out of the window!”

The coroner called for order, and commanded the Janeville man to leave the room. Mr. Scantling then made a short speech in which he protested against any insinuations affecting his client. While Major Wickham was a comparative stranger, he had come to him so well recommended that he was willing to vouch for his perfect honesty and good faith. When he was through Gilbert said:

“I think it will not be hard for those who know the facts, to understand that my sister’s nerves must be somewhat shaken—under the circumstances. I think she does not wish to be unjust or unkind, but it may be well for us all to try to understand how all this must look to her. This dead man was our brother. Of that we have not even the shadow of a doubt. What has been brought out by this gentleman and his lawyer, is very remarkable; but I am willing to believe that this strange resemblance in clothing and so forth is nothing more than a strange coincidence—a very remarkable one, the most remarkable in history perhaps. For my sister I will say that, from childhood, her characteristic fault has been incredulity. Surely some allowance can be made, in the case of a person not naturally credulous, if she is not prepared to believe, at a moment’s notice, in all these wonderful

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accidents. She is not a trained reasoner—like this legal gentleman.”

The coroner adjourned the meeting, pending a visit to the morgue by Major Wickham.

I was again in my place behind the curtain some minutes before the proceeding was resumed. The final surprise of a most astounding series of surprises awaited me. The moment the parties re-entered the office, I saw the coroner was worried and perplexed. He said:

“This is certainly the most extraordinary thing that ever happened in this world. Major Wickham, are you sure—quite sure you are not mistaken?”

“I would give a thousand dollars if I were not sure. It is the body of my unfortunate nephew, sir. He is my brother’s son. I don’t mind saying—there are no reporters about—that I am not surprised at his death. He was—well he was a little wild, poor fellow—and of course he got into bad company and—and they murdered him. But he’s my nephew, sir, and I’ll spend the last dollar I have, before I give him up.”

In rendering his decision, the coroner took what must have been, for him, the easiest road out of a very perplexing situation. Before the coming of Mr. Wickham he had virtually delivered the body over to Gilbert. He chose therefore to regard Gilbert as the man in possession. He admitted that it was not easy

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for him to decide the question to his own entire satisfaction. Major Wickham had surely made out a strong case, but not so strong as to justify the authorities in disturbing the possession of the first claimants.

This was well enough, but one look at the stubborn countenance of the Major convinced me the matter would not end there. I was not mistaken. Gilbert, with the aid of the undertaker previously mentioned, had got the body ready for shipment by five o'clock that afternoon; but by that time a judge of one of the courts, sitting in chambers, had issued a temporary injunction, at the suit of Major Wickham, forbidding the removal of the body from the city.

Gilbert, acting by the advice of a lawyer, gave bond, with proper legal penalties, to produce the remains, when so ordered by the court, as well as for the payment of all costs and damages which might be adjudged against him. The Judge accepted our Janeville friends as bondsmen, all of them being solvent enough. This part of the business may have been a little loose, but I suppose the court considered that the body should be buried as soon as possible. All this was finished in time for Gilbert and his party to leave on the nine o'clock train that evening.

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CHAPTER XIII.

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I decided not to leave St. Brandan until after June 21, the date set for the final hearing of the injunction suit. I made arrangements with the publisher of a weekly newspaper to solicit advertisements—on commission. Very dreary, up-hill work, in the hot June weather, but it was surely better than idleness. I made enough, counting one day with another, to pay living expenses.

There came a day when I did not work—the day when I received a marked copy of my old newspaper, the “Janeville Banner.” My friend, the original owner of that journal, had evidently made as much as he could, with his limited ability, of the sensational events already related. In the copy sent me he had described, at great length, the arrival of the funeral party at Janeville, the elaborate and solemn services at the church, and the final sensation that poor body was destined to cause, before it could be finally consigned to the earth whence it was taken. These are the facts, as I condense them from the editor’s account:

“At the conclusion of the very eloquent and touching funeral discourse, delivered by the Reverend Mr.

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Wymore, the people present were invited to approach and take a last look at their distinguished fellow-townsmen. At this point a very painful and very distressing incident occurred. Among those who went to gaze, for the last time, on the cold, still features of the dead, was Miss Judith Wymore, daughter of the officiating minister. There is, we are sure, no impropriety in saying now, that a very warm attachment existed between the young lady and the deceased in his lifetime. The fact that they were betrothed is an open secret. To say the young lady was much distressed when the young man disappeared, is merely to do justice to her sweet and loving nature. She has always persisted in saying he was alive, even when it was clear to the most of us that our dear friend had been foully murdered. Yesterday she was among the last of those who walked in sad procession by the flower-laden bier. She paused by the side of the casket and looked long and earnestly at the face of the dead. All at once, to the astonishment of all present, she cried out:

“‘No, no! It is not he! Gracious heaven, it is not George Ward at all! Oh, Mr. Ward, you have been deceived! This dead man is not your brother!’

“So great was her agitation, she would have fallen, if her father had not caught her in his arms. She was removed from the church and conveyed to her home.

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“Naturally her words and actions created great excitement. Many of those who had passed the coffin came back again, and there was much confusion. It was sometime before, through the quiet exertions of some of the more thoughtful, order was restored, so that the services could be concluded. The body was carried out to the beautiful cemetery near the town and laid to rest. Peace to his ashes!

“The distressing scene above described, while very painful, is perhaps not unexplainable, but we do not presume to offer here the explanation which occurs to us. For the sake of all concerned we wish, with all our heart, the statement so dramatically uttered might be true. Unfortunately there is no room to doubt that she is mistaken. Miss Wymore is the only one of those present in the church yesterday who doubts the body is that of George Ward. Charles and Beulah Ward, while much distressed at the incident, have nothing but the warmest words of sympathy for the young lady, who, in her brief sojourn here, has won all our hearts by her grace of manner and kindheartedness.

“A reporter for the ‘Banner’ called at the home of Mr. Wymore late yesterday evening. He is naturally much distressed, but he declared that he could offer no explanation of his daughter’s conduct. ‘She still insists that her statement is true,’ he said, ‘but re-

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fuses to give any reasons for her belief. Words fail to express my feelings. She has always been a sensible girl—not in the least hysterical. I do not understand it.’

Here was a new complication. If this incident had been reported in the daily newspapers, we might expect that the Wickham party would have Judith in court if possible; and their case would be strengthened by so much as her opinion might be worth, in the mind of a disinterested judge. Disquieting, certainly, but it was not the reading of that article which caused me to send a telephone message to the office where I worked, asking to be excused from duty that day on account of sickness. There was another news item in the “Banner,” not marked, an item which caused me more real suffering in a few hours, than all I have ever read, in prose or rhyme. It is worthy of the careful consideration of the feeling reader:

“The many friends and admirers of Miss Judith Wy-more will rejoice to learn that she has recently fallen heir to an estate in Virginia, to the value of more than one hundred thousand dollars. The greater portion of the property is land, but there is now on hand the snug sum of \$10,000 in cash, in one of the banks of Richmond, which will be subject to her order as soon as a few preliminary matters are arranged. The estate comes to the lady from her maternal grandfather, the

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late Colonel Henderson Stapley, of Henrico County, Va. We most heartily congratulate Miss Wymore. Nobody deserves better luck."

I walked about the streets for a while, aimlessly, like a man in a dream. I felt that I had received a blow, a terrible, crushing blow, but, as yet, it did not hurt. I took a car and went out to one of the parks. Something, some sort of measured jangle in the humming of the cable, suggested to my mind a rhyme of Walter Scott:

"O what a tangled web we weave,
When first we practise to deceive!"

All the way out, the cable and the car wheels seemed to sing these words or keep time to them. In the park I sat down near a fountain; the water rippled and splashed to the words, "O what a tangled web we weave, when first we practise to deceive." A bumble-bee, hovering over a gorgeous bed of flowers, seemed to sing bass to the fountain's treble, "O what a tangled web we weave, when first we practise to deceive."

I wanted to think—to fathom, if possible, the pit into which I had fallen; but I could not adjust my mind to any coherent thinking. I caught myself repeating aloud, "O what a tangled web we weave, when first we practise to deceive." I fell into a sort of reverie about Walter Scott's poetry. Strange to say, I could think about that. I tried to remember when

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and where I had last read "Marmion." "What's Marmion to me, or I to Marmion?" I said. I recalled other lines by the same author—rhymes which certainly I had never committed to memory; and, for a while, fountain and summer wind and bumble-bee sang, "Where shall the lover rest, he, the deceiver, who could win maiden's breast, ruin and leave her?" Not applicable to anything in my life, thank Heaven. "In the lost battle, borne down by the flying, where mingles war's rattle with the groans of the dying." Queer mental condition, was it not, to be unable to dismiss these words from my mind? And why should I be annoyed by them? And why should I find something ominous in them? "Lost battle—"

I was not superstitious, but I could not avoid the thought that perhaps that phrase, "lost battle," might have in it some prophetic reference to the result of that legal battle soon to be fought in the court. Lost battle? One battle I had lost. At least there was one victory which had almost been mine, and I had not won it. I had stood, so to speak, upon the threshold of immeasurable happiness; but I had turned away, closing the door with my own hand. "Where shall the traitor rest, he, the deceiver—" No, I was no traitor. When I wooed her and won her love, I loved her. I loved her now. And I had thrown her love away for a paltry sum of money. It was the mockery

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of Satan to read to-day that she was rich. She was sweet, gentle, innocent, refined, cultured—a pure, good woman, as ever God made. I had thrown her away; and now the figures of her bank account came and stared me in the face. Ten thousand dollars, in cold cash, subject to her draft—much more than I could hope to clear from this wretched affair in which I was engaged. Do not misjudge me, dear reader. Remember, I loved her when she was poor! If she had been before me, at that moment, poor as when first I knew her, I should gladly have made her my wife—if it had been in my power. But when I began to think—for I could think now, at last—how I had cast in my lot with Gilbert, and peril, and possible dishonor, all for a few paltry dollars—when I began to think of the devilish pit dug for my feet by my cunning companions in sin, and when I remembered that money had been the cause of it all, I could almost believe I heard the devil laugh.

I had desperate ideas of extricating myself from the wretched quagmire of sin in which I wallowed. I thought of going to this dear girl, that I might throw myself unreservedly on her mercy and forbearance. Why not? Why not break away from this infamous connection and return to the woman who loved me? But then the questions arose: “What of Beulah, my

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wife? What would she and her satanic brother say to all that?"

All that forenoon I sat there, utterly crushed, heart-broken. At last there came into my mind something that was like a glimmer of hope, so that I managed to reason myself into a little better frame of mind. "Suppose," I said to myself, "this present business is brought to a successful end—to any end short of exposure and ruin. In either event Beulah and Gilbert would be glad enough to be quit of me. I began even to perceive a merit in the somewhat lax divorce laws of my native state, a beauty that I had never observed before.

"There will be," I said, "difficulties, of course. I can never, for instance, bear the name I bore in Janeville; but the only thing to regret about that will be the necessity of explaining to Judith how my name happens to be Michael Carmichael, instead of George William Ward. Yet even that should be possible, and then—then I will marry her, and we will go to her estate in Virginia. I will manage her property and if, after all, I should realize a little on this present business, the money will come in handy. It will be better perhaps not to be altogether dependent upon my wife's bounty—though she would share her last penny with me, bless her heart!"

These reflections were certainly pleasant enough,

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and they did not seem unreasonable. There was the disturbing thought that, inasmuch as Gilbert and Beulah must know of the inheritance, it behooved me to walk warily before them. Rapacious and sordid themselves, they might easily suspect like faults in me, and hence be suspicious of me. Perhaps also, this business once over, they would want to share with me what they might call the "spoils" of this other affair; but here I was determined to be resolute. They should not pillage Judith while I lived.

It was noon when I left the park. All through my meditations, the words of the squire's song in "Marmion" haunted me. For the last half hour it was the grim conclusion of it, that insisted on being heard. I could hardly avoid quoting it aloud on the street-car.

"Her wing shall the eagle flap,
O'er the false hearted;
His warm blood the wolf shall lap,
E'er life be parted:
Shame and dishonor sit,
By his grave ever,
Blessing shall hallow it,
Never—O never!"

"False hearted!" I muttered. "In this case the false hearted are those who have entrapped me into this shameful position and, in cold blood, have robbed me of the woman I love, as noble, generous and free-

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hearted a woman as walks the earth. If the wolf laps anybody's blood—"

On the evening of the twentieth of June, our witnesses arrived at the union station. I was there, but made no attempt to speak to Gilbert, feeling sure he would let me know if there should be any occasion for a conference. I was not foolish enough to follow him to his hotel, nor did I expect he would send any message to my lodging; but, by way of experiment, I went to our former place of meeting on the bridge. He did not come, though I waited there several hours. I was disappointed, because I wished to ask his advice as to whether I should attend the trial.

Next morning it seemed to me that I could not possibly keep away from the court. It was certainly not a time for rash experiments, but I had a good deal of confidence in the completeness of my disguise. True, I had never worn it in the presence of any of the Janeville people, but I thought, if I could avoid coming near any of them, the risk would not be very great. It would be useless for me to go to work, in my present state of mind, and the idea of remaining shut up in my room was hardly to be endured. If I did not attend the trial I could not know the result of it that day. I would have to wait for the announcement in tomorrow's papers.

I closed and locked the door of the room and hung

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my hat over the key-hole. I closed the shutters, drew the blinds, and lighted the gas. I removed my false hair and examined myself attentively in the glass. Then I resumed my disguise and took another long and searching look. Assuredly there was little in the disguised face that resembled the late editor of the "Janeville Banner." I believed that, by mingling with the crowd, keeping well aloof from all who knew me, taking my place in some obscure corner of the court room I should be perfectly safe. I was there before the court opened. As I did not think it prudent to enter the place before it was well filled, I sauntered about the corridors of the building, waiting for the arrival of the plaintiff and defendant with their witnesses. When I saw Gilbert and Beulah, with our Janeville friends, ascending the stairs, I prudently turned my back until they entered the courtroom. As I had no fears of being recognized by the other party, and as I had some natural curiosity to see the witnesses, I was near the head of the stairs when they approached. Major Wickham and Mr. Scantling came first, then followed several men and three women. One of these, as I afterwards learned, was Mrs. Wickham, wife of the Major, and aunt by marriage to the missing young man. There was an old Negro woman, who in the proceedings that day was called to testify about the clothing and other articles involved in the

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question of identity. There was, also, a woman whose face I could not see; she was closely veiled, and leaned upon the arm of the elder lady. I guessed this might be either a sister of the betrothed of young Wickham. Naturally this interested me and with the curiosity natural to youth I was anxious, if possible, to get a nearer view of her. Other idle fellows about the corridor had evidently the same desire, for almost before I was aware of it I was foremost of a group which crowded close to the door of the court room when the party approached it. The veiled lady walked with her eyes cast down, until the proximity, as I suppose, of the crowd of idlers, caused her to look up. She raised her head, stopped, gave a spasmodic clutch at her throat, and fell to the floor as if she had received a fatal shot. The crowd closed round her and, of course, every other idler in the corridor immediately joined them. I was not so rude. I not only extricated myself from the throng, but left the building hurriedly for a short walk on the street. As I descended the stairs, I heard Scantling, the lawyer, say:

“Please stand back. The lady has fainted. Let us get her into the clerk’s room.”

I was disturbed by this incident, I hardly knew why. I wondered what had made her faint. It seemed to me that when she raised her eyes she had looked at me. What did she see? Whom did she see? Had

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her fainting anything to do with anybody or anything she saw? Ought I, under the circumstances, to go back there? The voice of prudence seemed to whisper to me:

“Keep away. Pity that a game so well played, up to this time, should be spoiled by an act of imprudence! No doubt, the suspense will be great, but it cannot last forever. Do not return!”

For a little while I heeded the voice of prudence, walking about the streets for the greater part of an hour. At the end of that time I felt that I could endure the suspense no longer. I went back and entered the court room, obtaining a very good seat in an obscure corner whence I could see and hear very well, without being at all conspicuous.

Major Wickham, as the plaintiff, was first required to produce his evidence. It was in substance the same he had given before the coroner. He positively identified the clothing and other articles; and he emphatically declared the body he had seen at the morgue was that of his nephew, Gerald Wentworth Wickham. He was not shaken by the rigid cross examination of our lawyer—for it appeared that Gilbert had engaged one—except as to his temper. He certainly had an abundance of temper, and there were moments when I thought it would have given him extreme pleasure to assault our attorney. However, he re-

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strained himself and did nothing to prejudice his case. The other witnesses for the plaintiff, the male witnesses, were all able to describe the missing Mr. Wickham, with more or less minuteness; and the description given by each of them corresponded very well with the appearance of the body found in the box. Yet, they had not seen the body and were, in that particular, at a disadvantage as compared with ours. Their best witness was the colored woman. She had been the nurse of young Wickham. She swore she recognized the clothing as the property of her young master. Altogether, as it seemed to me, they did not make a stronger case in this court than they had made before the coroner. At the conclusion of the negro woman's testimony, Mr. Scantling said:

"This is our case, your honor,—except as to the testimony of one witness, who is now too ill to appear. If we can have an adjournment until one o'clock this afternoon, we can, we think, have that witness present. Or, if the defendant will now proceed with his evidence, we will have the witness here by the time he is through."

At first, our lawyer seemed disposed to object to this irregular, unusual and vexatious method of doing business; but after a short whispered colloquy with Gilbert, he indicated his willingness to adjourn, in compliance with Mr. Scantling's proposal. Here the

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Judge interposed. He said the recess proposed would be so much lost time, as no case now on the docket could be tried in the interval. Other litigants in that court had some rights which must be respected. He must therefore insist that the defendant go on with the examination of witnesses—if it could not be shown that the proceeding involved some injury to either party.

Our witnesses were sworn, and Gilbert took the stand. He was followed by Beulah, who was succeeded by the other witnesses from Janeville, one after another. In his cross-examination of Gilbert and Beulah, the plaintiff's lawyer brought out the fact that my life had been heavily insured, and the fact that they were my heirs. I had a presentiment of coming trouble during a series of questions propounded to the first of the other witnesses.

"Did you see the dead body in question?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"At the morgue, in St. Brandan, and afterwards when it was brought to Janeville."

"Were you in the church in Janeville, on the day of the funeral?"

"Yes, sir."

"State if anything unusual occurred there, in the church, that day?"

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(Question objected to by defendant. Objection sustained.)

"Did you go up to view the body, after the funeral sermon?"

"Yes, sir."

"You fully recognized the body as that of George Ward?"

"I did."

"Did any other person present, to your knowledge, fail to recognize the body?"

(Objected to, on the ground that the witness was not competent to speak of another person's state of mind, with respect to that, or any other matter. Objection sustained.)

"Did you see any one faint in the church that day?"

(Objected to on the ground that the witness, not being a medical expert, was not competent to say whether or not a person had fainted. Objection sustained. The Judge, however, expressed the hope that the gentlemen would not become too technical, since this was not a jury case, the court felt perfectly competent to sift the chaff from the wheat—if they would let him.)

As matters now stood we had the better case, beyond question. The legal presumption in our favor had been strengthened by the testimony of our wit-

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nesses; and it had not been weakened, as well as I could judge, by any evidence on their part.

"Our friend, the defendant, seems to be having things his own way," said a voice close to my ear.

I turned my head and saw that a gentleman who sat near me, on the left, had spoken. He was a tall man, dressed in a gray business suit. He had iron-gray hair cropped close to his head, and he wore no beard.

"Yes," I replied, "he seems to be doing very well. What do you—"

"Order in the court!" shouted a man inside the bar.

As it was now near noon, the court took a recess until one o'clock. The gentleman in the gray suit had some sandwiches in a paper and offered me one. He proved to be a very pleasant, companionable man. I was glad of his company, for he helped me to while away, what might otherwise have been a very tedious hour, pending the re-opening of the court.

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CHAPTER XIV.

A STRANGE DECLARATION.

When the plaintiff and his witnesses entered the court, at the close of the noon recess, I saw the veiled lady among them. She leaned upon the arm of a tall, elderly person whose face I could not see. She sat down near one of the tables, between her escort and Mr. Scantling.

In response to a question by the court, Mr. Bills said, the defendant would offer no more evidence, unless in rebuttal.

"Very well," said the Judge. "If your other witness is present, Mr. Scantling, you will proceed with your case."

"Miss Judith Wymore will now be sworn," said the lawyer.

I was not quite unprepared for this, as the intelligent reader may well suppose. I had feared something of the kind when I read of the scene in the church at Janeville. But I had not suspected that the veiled woman leaning on the arm of Mrs. Colonel Wickham, might be Judith—until she fainted. Then indeed I had some misgivings. Nevertheless, the announcement of her name, conveying the positive as-

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surance that she was actually there, was enough to upset me. Now also, for the first time, came the thought that her recognition of me—if she had recognized me—meant danger. In fact, I half rose to my feet with a vague idea of making a bolt for the street.

“Bad ventilation,” said a voice in my ear. “Take a pull at this. Room over-crowded. Enough to make a dog sick.”

It was my neighbor in the gray suit. Though never, at any time, addicted to the use of strong drink, I succumbed to the temptation in this instance, I am sorry to say, and swallowed a mouthful of liquor from the flask he offered me.

By this time Judith had been sworn and had taken her place in the witness box. She had removed her veil and I could see her features plainly as she faced the Judge. She was as pale as marble, but her look was composed.

After the usual preliminary questions as to name and residence, Mr. Scantling asked:

“Did you know George William Ward, whose body, the defendant declared, was brought to Janeville for burial?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Did you know him intimately?”

Form of question objected to.

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"State what degree of intimacy existed between you and George W. Ward."

"He was a member of our church—the church where my father preaches, and—he came to our house frequently."

"On the occasions when he visited your home, were you, as a rule, in his company?"

"I was."

There was some little wrangling about the form of this question, and the court cautioned Mr. Scantling to be careful, and also advised Mr. Bills not to be too technical.

"Very well," said Mr. Scantling. "Will the witness please tell the court the reason, if she knows, of Mr. Ward's frequent visits to her father's house?"

"Must I answer that?"

"You should answer it," said the Judge, kindly.

I thought her lips trembled for a moment, but there was no tremor in her voice when she replied:

"We were to be married."

I looked at Beulah, but she wore her veil down. Gilbert was wiping his eyes in a very simple, unostentatious way. I thought there were tears in the eyes of our lawyer. As for me, the simple pathetic words pierced my heart like a dagger. The lawyer resumed:

"Please tell the court whether you saw the body

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which was brought to Janeville and buried, as that of George Ward."

"I did."

"State whose body it was—if you know."

"I do not know. I never saw the man before. It was not George Ward."

"Are you sure?"

"Quite sure."

"Will you please tell the court how you know the body was not that of your betrothed?"

She hesitated and looked troubled. After a short delay she answered:

"It was not George Ward. The resemblance was very strong—strong enough to deceive his brother and his sister, but I—O my God! How could I be deceived?"

"Therefore, you swear positively that it was not the body of Mr. Ward which you saw in the church at Janeville."

"Positively."

Mr. Conkling seemed to be in doubt at this point. The hesitation of the lady troubled him, I suppose. Finally, he decided not to question her further. I would have given something to be able to whisper a word in the ear of Mr. Bills at that moment. It seemed to me that Gilbert ought to have advised him

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to let her go. But Gilbert, I am bound to admit, was wiser than any of us.

"Miss Wymore," said Mr. Bills, "you know, do you not, that Mr. Henry Ward, brother to the missing George Ward, and his sister Beulah, and a majority of the people of Janeville, recognized the body you saw in the church as the corpse of George Ward?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you think they are all mistaken—all his friends and neighbors, and his brother and sister, who had known him from childhood—all mistaken?"

"Yes, sir."

"But you, who had known him for a few months only—you are not mistaken?"

"No, sir."

"Was there any mark upon the features of George Ward—any peculiarity, the absence of which might be noted on the person of that dead man as he lay in his coffin, discoverable by you, and not by others?"

"I think not."

"Have you then any peculiar knowledge, not in the possession of others, which enables you to swear so positively here that it was not George Ward?"

She was silent for some time. At last she said, slowly and with manifest reluctance:

"I have."

"Then please tell the court what it is."

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"Is that necessary? Surely when I swear positively, that is enough."

"Better tell it," said the court.

"But indeed—indeed, I cannot," she cried.

"Young lady," said the Judge, "I think there is no one in this room who does not appreciate the very painful position in which you are placed. Yet you should remember the situation is not painful to you alone. The plaintiff, a venerable member of an old and highly-respected family, is here contending for possession of the body of a relative. Try to think what a public trial, involving such an issue, must be to him. If his plea is just decency and humanity require that it should be granted. Then here are a brother and sister, perfectly convinced, I am sure, that they are fighting to retain possession of their brother's remains. Think of the horrible cruelty, if they are right in their contention, of causing his grave to be opened that a stranger may take away his bones. Can you not perceive that, in this case, who loses, wins? If it is in your power to demonstrate the falsity of either claim, you become the benefactor of that claimant, for you give a hope, at least, that the loved one is not dead. Distressing as your position is, you must see that the court is compelled to insist that you give the information asked."

She was not convinced by this wise and temperate

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speech. At last the Judge warned her that he had power to commit her for contempt.

"If you send me to jail, I shall not have to answer? Have I that alternative? No, father,—it is useless. I will gladly go to prison, Judge, if I may choose either to go there or obey your command."

I now observed that the tall man who had entered the room with her, was her father. In his excitement he had got upon his feet. Here and there all over the room people were standing, while others leaned eagerly forward. The lawyers were clearly astonished. Even Gilbert looked surprised and mildly sympathetic. At last the Judge said:

"Miss Wymore, I heard you speak of your father's church. Are you a member of it?"

"Yes."

"You are a Christian?"

"I hope so. I try to be."

"Do you remember the oath you took when you came upon the stand, pledging yourself to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth?"

"I understood that I was sworn to tell the truth, but it sounded to me like one long word, as the gentleman repeated it."

The gentleman—the clerk—blushed. The Judge smiled and then read the oath to her once more clearly and distinctly. Then he said:

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"Have you, in fact, told the whole truth, the entire, perfect truth, without reservation or evasion?"

Her head drooped slightly, and a wave of color swept over her face, and then passed away, leaving her paler, if possible, than before. The Judge went on inexorably:

"Can you, a Christian woman, reconcile it with your conscience to refuse to perform what you have sworn to do? There is an ugly word the law gives to that sort of thing. Do you know what it is?"

I did not understand the answer, but the Judge repeated it:

"Yes—perjury."

He waited a moment. Then he said:

"You will answer the question?"

"God help me! I must."

"Repeat your question, Mr. Bills," said the Judge.

"I ask you to tell the court what peculiar knowledge you have which enables you to say, so positively, that the body exhibited in the church at Janeville was not that of George W. Ward."

"George William Ward is not dead!"

Instantly the court room began to spin around a circle of which I was the center.

"Take another small sip," whispered my friend in gray. "You ought to see a doctor."

"I perceived, when the floor and ceiling ceased their

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gyration, that the last statement of the witness had created a general sensation. Both lawyers, all the witnesses, and two-thirds of the spectators were standing. Reporters' pencils were going at a rapid rate. Even the cool and dignified judge looked astonished. I looked at Gilbert and was comforted to observe that this distinguished actor did not forget the stage business proper to the situation. He had stretched out his right hand and clasped, with his strong, white fingers, the two hands of his sister as they lay folded in her lap. She appeared to be crying, but I could not see her face. Nothing could be more natural and unaffected than the bearing of the brother and sister at this trying moment. It was impossible not to admire the courage, audacity and genius of this unscrupulous man, as exhibited in this trying situation. I guessed that he had seen this storm brewing all day and was not unprepared when it came. He had understood the scene in the corridor that morning.

After several efforts the court officials managed to restore order among the large number of spectators. Mr. Bills looked puzzled. He had certainly not expected that reply.

"Your honor," he said, addressing the court, "I feel that this answer of the witness is a surprise to all concerned,—to the plaintiff no less than to us. Therefore, with the consent of Mr. Scantling, I will ask the

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court to propound such further questions as he may wish to have answered."

The Judge said:

"Miss Wymore, you declare that George Ward is not dead. Did you know that when you went to look at the body in the church?"

"No, sir."

This answer again startled the court and the lawyers, as I could easily see. The court resumed:

"I will ask you to state how you know he is not dead."

"Because I have seen him since—alive."

"Please explain."

"I met George Ward this morning, face to face,—here in this building."

"Is it possible? Are you sure of this?"

"Perfectly sure. As sure as that I now see you."

"Did you speak to him?"

"No, sir."

"May I ask why?"

"I—I fainted."

"Was he disguised in any way?"

"Yes."

"Can you describe his appearance, as you saw him to-day?"

"I will not. Positively. Not if you send me to jail for life."

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A little color came into her face when she said this, but it passed quickly away.

"I shall not send you to jail," said the Judge kindly. "I have asked you the question for reasons which should be perfectly clear to you. If you can so describe the man you saw that he may be found, it will be the best way to settle this unhappy matter, because it will then be settled right—to the entire satisfaction of all concerned."

"I have done what I believe to be my duty, so far. I will say no more."

Without waiting for the permission of the court she returned to her seat by her father's side, lowering her veil as she went.

"What next, gentlemen?" said the Judge.

I saw Gilbert whisper to Mr. Bills, after which that gentleman arose and said:

"Owing to the very extraordinary turn this case has taken, I have to ask your honor to grant me time for a short consultation with my client."

Mr. Scantling interposed some objection, but the court asked:

"How much time do you want, Mr. Bills?"

"Thirty minutes will do."

"Very well, call the next case, Mr. Clerk."

A little before the expiration of the thirty minutes Gilbert and the lawyer re-entered the room. Mr. Bills

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said, as soon as he could gain the attention of the Judge:

“May it please the court, my client, Mr. Ward, feels that he is placed in a very unpleasant position by the testimony of the last witness. He wishes me to say that he feels nothing but the most profound respect and sympathy for the young lady who, as he now for the first time learns, was betrothed to his brother. If the statement last made by the witness is true, it opens the way for ugly inferences respecting Mr. Gilbert and his sister. The only thing for an honorable man to do, as matters now stand, is to go to the bottom of this business, if it may be done. Under the circumstances, we undertake to impeach the evidence of Miss Wymore.”

It was our turn now to produce a sensation, and we did it. I thought, for a moment, that Mr. Wymore, man of God as he was, would strike Mr. Bills. The witnesses from Janeville looked at one another, at the court, at the lawyer, in open-mouthed astonishment. Even Mr. Scantling, accustomed as he must have been to strange happenings in courts, was like a man whose breath had been knocked out of him, but he soon recovered and rose to his feet laughing.

“Your honor,” he said, “if my learned brother wishes to impeach Miss Wymore—to assail her reputation for veracity in the place where she lives, let

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him do so by all means. I ask nothing better than the testimony, on that point, of his own witnesses from Janeville."

"The gentleman has not understood me," said Mr. Bills. "May it please the court, it is not any question of morality we raise, but a question of sanity. It is not for me to define the extent of her malady. It may well be that, in some things, she is sane enough. But in this matter she is undoubtedly suffering under a strange mental delusion—hallucination is perhaps the right name for it. It will not be our purpose to show that the ordeal through which this delicate, sensitive lady has passed might dethrone the reason of nine women in ten, but to show that it has, in fact, dethroned hers. If non-medical witnesses might serve, I should be content with the testimony of this venerable minister of the gospel, her own father. But we have here a medical gentleman from her own town—called here to testify on another matter, and we can procure the testimony of the St. Brandan physician who attended her this morning, so there need be no delay. However, I am willing to allow a reasonable time, if the plaintiffs are not ready—asking the court to reserve its decision on the main point until then."

"Have you any precedent for impeaching a witness on this ground?" asked Mr. Scantling.

"I have not sought for any," said Mr. Bills. "No

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court will receive the testimony of an insane person. The authorities are clear on that point. The fact of insanity, I should say, may be proved like any other fact."

"Mr. Scantling," said the Judge, "will you take up this matter now? I will do what I can to accommodate the parties, but counsel must remember that delay would involve much expense to all concerned."

"But I protest," said the lawyer for the plaintiff. "The whole proceeding is not only irregular, but it is inhuman. After what this lady has suffered, it will be cruel in the extreme to compel her to sit here and be tried as a lunatic."

"The court," replied Mr. Bills, "has already called attention to the fact that cruelty is inherent in this case, from first to last. Any possible outcome of it, now, must be brutal; but I respectfully submit to your honor that to leave matters in their present shape would be the most cruel thing of all. However, since my friend shrinks from cruelty, there is one very good way out of it. Let him agree that this evidence shall be stricken from the records of the court—that it be, in fact, ignored by the court. I make the offer with reluctance, feeling that I am hardly just to my client in doing so—but I make it out of sincere pity for the young woman. The gentleman has only to analyze

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the conduct of this girl from the day of the funeral till now, to perceive that she cannot be in her right mind."

Here an idea occurred to the Judge. I tremble now to think how very brilliant it might have proved, had it served its purpose. He asked Judith to return to the witness box. When she had done so, he said:

"You have heard what has been said concerning your mental condition?"

"Yes, sir."

"Can you not now see how very important it is that you should describe the appearance of George Ward—as you saw him this morning? If you can cause him to be found, it will set at rest forever this cruel doubt of your sanity."

"I am not interested to prove my sanity. I may be crazy—I have suffered enough to make me so. I am not quite sure myself, as to that—at times. I will say no more. Send me to the jail—or to an asylum, if you wish."

She walked back to her place with the air of one utterly weary, sat down and leaned her head against her father's shoulder. As for me, I gave a sigh of relief. Nine hundred and ninety-nine women in her place would have set themselves right, under the circumstances. It seemed to me that Gilbert had staked our whole case on the assumption that she would be the thousandth woman, who would not yield under

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any circumstances. It was a dreadful risk, but—he was right.

At this point, Major Wickham rose, after a whispered conversation with his attorney, and asked if the court would let him say a word. It was irregular, he knew, but he would not abuse the privilege in any way. After some hesitation, the Judge said he might speak, if he would be brief.

“In justice to my attorney,” he said, “I must say that I am acting contrary to my own interests in this case—not contrary to what both he and I believe to be right and just. I am as sure at this moment as I ever was, that the body these people have buried is the body of my nephew. I came here to-day in the hope, that his remains might be given to me, so that I could lay them by his father’s side in our family burying-place. Even now, sir, under any other circumstances, I would litigate this matter through all the courts of this country; but—this sweet young lady—she will pardon the expression, I hope—must not be subjected to any such infamous ordeal. She is no more insane than this court is, at this moment. But she came here at my request, like the lady she is, to testify in this case. Neither she nor her father shall have cause to regret that kindness, as far as I can control the matter. My nephew was—er—well, he was my nephew, but with all due respect to his memory,

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he was not worth as much as all that; and I'll be—I beg the court's pardon. This must stop where it is. Strike her testimony from the record, by agreement, if that is the only way to stop this proposed impeachment. She is not crazy. I wish to God, many more people I could name were half as sane."

After some discussion it was agreed that her evidence should be stricken from the record. In his summing up the Judge said:

"Up to the introduction of Miss Wymore's testimony, the plaintiff had by no means produced evidence to convince me the defendant was wrongfully in possession. Taking into account the extraordinary nature of her testimony, both as to the manner and the matter of it, I must have required some strong corroboration of it, from some source, even if the question of her mental condition had never been raised. Her positive refusal to testify as to certain important facts, especially as to the disguise worn by the alleged George Ward, must, in any case, have weakened the force of her testimony. The court must find for the defendant."

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CHAPTER XV.

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After the decision was rendered, I walked about the streets for several hours. I could not feel greatly elated over our victory. As the case now stood, it offered plenty of ground for litigation, if the insurance companies should decide to fight us in the courts. They were certainly in a position to demand some reduction of our claims, by way of compromise. Even if we should gain the whole amount, I must be a loser, in the matter of dollars and cents, to say nothing of my greater loss. My share, if paid down to the last penny, would hardly amount to the cash balance my darling now had at her banker's. What a situation was mine! A dead man in theory, Beulah's husband in fact! And I might have been rich, honored, with the sweetest woman in the world for my wife. Dear girl, how well she loved me! How nobly she had passed through that day's trials for my sake! How grand she was in concealing my identity. And now I must skulk through the world, a man in hiding, the rest of my days! I might indeed divorce Beulah, and I might even induce Judith to marry me, but I could never

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look the world in the face, as an honest man with nothing to hide and nothing to fear.

It was nearly dark when I returned to my room. I had been there only a few minutes when some one knocked at my door. The visitor proved to be that good Samaritan who had twice that day offered me his whiskey bottle in the court room. He allowed me no time to express my surprise at his visit; he entered the room, closed the door, locked it, and put the key in his trouser's pocket.

"Mr. George William Ward," he said, "I have come to see you. As soon as you can recover your breath, we must have a little conversation."

I sat down upon my bed, too dazed for the moment, to realize the awful significance of the man's words. The stranger took the one chair in the room and sat down in it, with his back to the closed door.

"Will I have the goodness to say what it is that procures for you the honor of this visit? You look the question though you do not ask it. My name is McCurdy, Jason McCurdy, at your service. I conduct a private inquiry bureau—am a private detective, if I may use that somewhat overworked word. I am employed by Miss Judith Wymore to ascertain, if possible, whether one George W. Ward, late of Janeville, Mo., is alive or dead. He is alive, I rejoice to say. Very much alive, and very well, too—may I hope?"

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This was awful. I felt as if the earth were about to open and swallow me—yet, frightened as I was, I could not succumb without a struggle.

“Great Heavens!” I exclaimed, as if talking to myself. “What am I to do? Shut up here alone with a lun— Pray, my good fellow, please go down now. You have come to the wrong house. The man you are looking for lives next door—at number 1427.”

He stared at me for a moment, as if he might really be the mental imbecile my words implied. Then he threw his head back and laughed till the tears rolled down his cheeks.

“Holy smoke!” he exclaimed. “What a great day for the insanity dodge! My word, the Ward family are well read up on lunacy! Well now to— Excuse me, your wig is on a little wrong—twisted to one side.”

My blood boils, even now, when I think of the ease with which he caught me by this cheap trick. The base, cunning scoundrel! I clapped my hand to my head before I thought, and as he coarsely expressed it—“the jig was up.”

I suppose my face must have betrayed the murderous impulse of my heart at that moment, for he raised his hand, and showed me the steel barrel of a small derringer pistol. It may have been in his hand when he came in, or it may have been concealed in his sleeve. He spoke sternly:

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"No foolishness. I must ask you to put up your hands, please. Put them up against the wall—they will not soil the paper, strange to say. There."

It was of no earthly use to resist. Moreover, my common sense came to my aid and told me that a row which might attract the attention of other inmates of the house was not to be desired. He first searched my person to make sure I had no weapons; then, before I could even guess his intention, he snatched my false hair from my head. Ah the shame—the cruel humiliation!

"You contemptible dog!" I said. "If I had you—"

"Yes," he interrupted me, with insolent coolness, "I do not doubt it—not the least bit in the world. But you haven't, you know."

"Are you aware that you have no legal right to—"

"Bless you, yes. Perfectly aware. Illegal from start to finish. Plain case of assaulting a gentleman in his own house. Shall we have a policeman up? You see I have not even a warrant for your arrest. Which is a circumstance for rejoicing or regret—just as you look at it."

This wicked fellow had me in his power, as he well knew. Certainly there was nothing to be gained, on my part, by flying into a rage and so losing the little wit God had given me. I sat down on my bed, folded

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my arms across my breast and waited to hear what he had to say.

“Shall we talk?” he asked.

“You may talk,” I said.

“All right. Sorry if I have been rough with you, but it may please you to know that I regard you as one of the most daring and unscrupulous of all the—rascals I have met in a long and eventful career of rascal-hunting. I confess I went into this case without much hope of success. It may interest you to know that I was, for a while, disposed to believe my employer’s troubles had unsettled her reason. But she offered me a good fee, with a good contingent fee in case I succeeded. Not necessary for me to explain how she first heard of me. It seems that, just about the time she convinced herself that the celebrated box victim was not George Ward, she inherited some money, and determined to employ a little of it in a search for that gentleman. By the way, whose body is it? Wickham’s? Well, never mind. When she discovered that the dead man was not you, she naturally, though perhaps illogically, concluded you could not be dead. She had read of people who had suddenly become insane, forgetting their own names and everything connected with their past lives, wandering about for years in that condition. That, in her opinion, was

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what had happened to you. Somebody advised her to consult me; and so I got my present job.

“The girl never suspected you of any wrong-doing; but as for me, when I looked into the facts, I felt tolerably sure she was mistaken one way or the other. Either you were dead or, if alive, you were something worse than a forlorn lunatic running at large in a cold, unfriendly world. I did not communicate my suspicions to her, because, on the face of things, the whole business seemed to be so fair and above board, as far as your brother and sister were concerned, that I had not a single fact to go upon. Your brother Charles had seemingly made all reasonable efforts to find his missing brother. He had made long and expensive journeys to examine corpses which were supposed to resemble you. After all, the death theory seemed the more reasonable alternative. I began to be discouraged, and was almost ready to believe that the only lunatic in the case was the lady who had employed me.

“Yet, assuming that you were alive, you might be in concealment for the purpose of defrauding the insurance companies. In that case there would be one weak spot in your scheme. You would find it necessary, sometime, to meet your confederates in the interests of your scheme. Therefore, the person to be watched must be your brother. I watched him at

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Janeville, but nothing came of it. I followed him to St. Brandan, and have kept him in sight ever since, but nothing came of it. I was feeling blue about it.

"I went to the court house this morning, and watched the doors and corridors. Your brother entered, but nobody approached him, nor did he look as if he had any earthly interest in any person present. Then the lady fainted, and an odd thing happened. While all the other idlers there crowded around her, as idlers always will do in such cases, one man, in the front rank, seemed anxious to get away—elbowed the others aside, and hurried out. Him I followed. He walked about the streets, and acted as if he were much troubled about something. At last he returned to the court house—as I hoped and believed he would. I followed him in and sat down by him where I could study his features and watch every expression of his face. Man, you gave yourself away a half-dozen times. What angel (or devil) guided your steps to that place to-day? Well, that is my story. Here I am and here you are—and your name is George William Ward, and I have earned my money, contingent fee and all."

I sat silent for awhile. Evidently I was in this man's power, and, unless I could make some terms with him, the outlook was very gloomy indeed.

"Well," I said at last, "as you say, here you are,

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and here I am. Now that we are here, now that you have earned your money, what next?"

"Next? I have to see my employer, who does not know of my success. It is for her to say what next."

"Do you object to telling me how much money, contingent fee and all, you are to get? It is not idle curiosity which prompts me to ask."

"No—no idle curiosity, I'm sure. You merely wish to inquire if I can be bought off. The sooner you dismiss that idea from your mind the less time you will lose. I am not posing as a saint, but I have my standard of professional honor—if I may call my business a profession—and I live up to it. Make your appeal to the lady; it is her affair, not mine."

"Good heavens! How can I look this woman in the face?"

"I do not know, I am sure. Maybe she will not care to be looked in the face by you. But now as to present arrangements. Since I have you, I must contrive to keep you, somehow."

"You need not fear," I said. "You have my word of honor I will not try to escape."

"I do not want to say anything unpleasant, young man, but when a gentleman has acted as you have, I—well, I should say that honor is a good topic to avoid, under the circumstances."

"No doubt, you are right," I retorted. "A detected

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swindler and a hired spy are not exactly the kind of people to find comfort in a subject like that. Have it your own way. Fix it to suit yourself."

"Thank you. We could bring a cot up here and have one of my men to sleep in the room with you; but that might lead to embarrassing questions on the part of your landlady. It will be better to take you out to my place. I can give you a bed and something to eat. It is a quiet place—you have no objection to privacy, have you?"

"Have it your own way," I repeated.

"Well, make such arrangements as you need for a temporary absence from home. Better tell your landlady you are going to spend the night with a friend—unless you think that one more straw will break the back of your conscience."

I do not know the name of the street where Mr-McCurdy lived, nor the street number, nor the quarter of the town in which the house was situated. By the time we were ready to start it was dark. We went in a closed carriage, and my mind was so occupied with my troubles, I gave no heed to the direction we took. Of the house, externally or internally, I will say nothing, except that there were bars across the windows of the room where I slept—to keep out burglars, McCurdy said. The room was very well furnished and I had a good bed—and a very good supper. Appar-

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ently the only inmate of the place, besides McCurdy, was a red-haired, beetle-browed man, an Irishman, I believe, though I never heard the sound of his voice. This man brought my meals and answered the bell when I needed anything.

I felt so much better after supper that I was able to reason with some degree of calmness on the state of my affairs. I began to believe that my case was not altogether desperate. I thought of the scenes in court, and I remembered how much Judith had endured for my sake. She loved me. If ever I had doubted that she loved me, there was no room for doubt now. I was in her power, as the barred windows in my room reminded me more than once, but she would not turn me over to the minions of the law. There should be worse things for a man than to be at the mercy of a woman who loves him.

As to McCurdy, he was a factor in the problem I had to solve, and he could not be ignored. At present he seemed to be wholly devoted to the interests of his employer; but the time must soon come for him to receive his pay and be discharged from her service. What would he do then? What would be his attitude toward me? It was not easy for me to guess—but that was a matter to be considered hereafter. I went to bed and, strange to say, slept soundly until breakfast time.

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When the man brought my breakfast, he brought also a morning paper. I read with much interest the account of the trial, as well as the able editorial on the subject of "Mistaken Identity."

McCurdy came in, about ten o'clock, and thrilled me with the announcement that Judith was in the house and would see me presently, in the garden; but I must remove my disguise. He had the goodness to order the red-haired man to bring up hot water and shave me.

When I was ready, the man conducted me downstairs and out into a yard in the rear of the premises. In the yard a gravel walk led down to a gate which seemed to open upon an alley. There were trees in the yard, and the ground was covered with a thick sward of grass. There were garden-seats here and there under the trees. A veiled woman, dressed in black, sat upon one of the seats near the walk. The red-haired man passed the woman and went to a bench near the alley gate, out of hearing of anything we might say, but in plain view.

I halted within a few feet of her and waited until the man was out of ear-shot. I hoped she would speak first, for in the presence of that small, veiled figure, I felt as if death would be the most blessed boon heaven could send me. She lifted her head as I drew near,

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but she waited for me to speak. At last I managed to stammer:

“Judith—Judith—”

She rose to her feet, keeping one hand upon the back of the seat, as if to steady herself. I advanced toward her with both hands outstretched, but she drew back, putting up her own hand, palm outward, as if to repel me.

“Please do not come any nearer,” she said. “I can see you quite well where you are; and you may know that—to see you—I have been at some trouble—and some cost. I see you now, and that is the end of my wish. I have no desire to touch you.”

This bitter speech ended in a sob, piteous to hear. I waited a moment and then spoke again:

“Judith, my darling—”

“Not that!” she cried. “For God’s sake, not that! If any spark of decency or manhood is in you, speak no word of endearment to me. This interview will end the moment you address me again in that manner, I warn you. And please remember you are to take no liberties with my name. Only my intimate friends call me Judith.”

“God bless you!” I said. “That is no term of endearment, but a prayer—however sinful the lips that utter it. Heaven forbid that I should fail to honor your lightest wish. I am here only to tell you how

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sorry I am; to tell you how utterly humiliated and ashamed I am; to ask your forgiveness, and die."

The reader need not be incredulous as to this speech, I uttered it as it is here written. I had prepared it carefully beforehand, and hence it remains fixed in my memory. Now that it lies written out before me, I think, as I thought then, it was a right noble speech, deserving at least a decent reception by the person to whom it was addressed. My knowledge of the female heart had suggested to me that the only thing to do was to throw myself unreservedly on her mercy. I have observed that a man is never so interesting in the eyes of a high-souled, pure-minded woman, as when he appears before her in the character of a penitent sinner. Which was the character, as the reader may remember, in which I first became an object of interest to Judith. But instead of replying to this touching speech, she sat down upon the end of the seat farthest from me; and when I attempted to sit down upon the same bench, she rose again. This action stung me to the quick. I stood up—even removed myself some distance, motioning her to resume her place. Yet I could not help saying with some bitterness:

"Time was when you were not afraid to sit by my side."

"That is a generous speech," she said, "such a

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speech as one might expect from a penitent sinner who only waits to be forgiven that he may die. A delicate allusion to the past which—which I did not need. If I had forgotten that—that other time, do you think I should be here to-day?"

"You are here," I said, "because you are a noble woman. You are here out of pity for the most abject and forlorn creature that crawls the earth—a wretch who would be honored above his deserts if he were allowed to kiss the hem of your dress—who will not forget, in time or eternity, your noble conduct yesterday."

"Have you always been a hypocrite and scoundrel?" she cried. "Have you been a criminal all the time—ever since I first knew you? When you—when you used to visit me, when you said you—loved me—were you a liar and hypocrite then, with criminal designs on other people's money? Has there been no moment of our acquaintance when my belief in you was well founded? When you professed to be converted, and when you joined the church—were you a thief then, in intent, as well as a blasphemer? And you will not forget, in time or in eternity, my conduct of yesterday! Oh, how long will it be before I forget that you were there; that you sat, an approving spectator, through the—through the whole performance!"

"On your part," I said gently, "are you sure you

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are quite generous and fair? You set a spy to hunt me down. To-day you have caused me to be dragged to this place—to stand before you as a detected thief. I am absolutely at your mercy. All you have to do is to call the nearest policeman and I am undone forever. I may not resent anything you say—could not if I would, would not if I could. You have the right to abuse me, because you have purchased it for good and lawful money; but, having the right, is it quite generous, quite merciful in you to exercise it to the fullest possible limit—to call me thief, hypocrite, liar, and other bad names?”

It seemed to me that here was the place where I should show some spirit. In dealing with women, I have observed that nothing so disconcerts them as an aggressive spirit shown at the time they least expect it. I have known that policy to disconcert even men.

She did, in fact, keep silent for awhile, so that I began to flatter myself I had put her in the position of defendant instead of accuser. At last she said, in a low voice, as if speaking to herself:

“Merciful? He is at my mercy. Hence he must submit to be called a thief, for I might call a policeman. And he reproaches me with cruelty. I thought to sting him into something—some exhibition of manhood; and I have stung him into one more pitiful, unblushing exhibition of hypocrisy. Father in Heaven,

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was there no such being as the man I loved, the hero of my dreams? Had he never an existence on earth?"

"Very well," I said. "So be it. I will prove to you, young woman, I am not the dastard you take me to be. Heaven be my witness, I will go this moment and surrender to the police. Yes, I admit it, life was sweet to me, and liberty was sweet; but rather than accept life and liberty at your hands, under present circumstances, I would cut my own throat. Here, you!" I cried, addressing the man by the gate. "Can you show me the way to the nearest police station?"

The man did not move, although I advanced half way to the place where he was sitting. I stood and waited for at least a minute, and then turned to note the effect of my words on Judith. To my surprise I found her by my side, her face unveiled, her eyes full of tears. "I have brought you to time, my lady," I said to myself. She placed both her small gloved hands upon my arm.

"Will you?" she said. "Have you the courage to do that? Sweetheart, I loved you because I thought you good, and strong, and brave, and true. I do not pretend to know all there may be in this horrible business. I know you have been drawn, in some way, into an attempt to wrong some people. I know the attempt is in a fair way to succeed if something is not done to prevent it. Have you indeed the courage to

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prevent this crime even if it involves a great act of self-sacrifice on your part? Will you indeed do this because it is right? Dear, do you remember when and where we spoke together last? Have you forgotten the moonlight, and the falling leaves, and the ripple of the waters below the bridge? I have not. I have not forgotten any, even the smallest detail of that scene. I have not forgotten a word you said. You hinted at a wrong done under great temptation—I understand now what you meant. Do you remember that you asked me—stay, I will repeat what you said: ‘If you loved a man, situated as my friend was, and that man, moved by a sense of duty toward God and society, denounced the scoundrel who was trying to lead him deeper into crime, meekly, uncomplainingly, accepting all consequences to himself, even though his duty should lead him to the penitentiary or the gallows, could you love him still?’ You asked me that. Do you remember what I said?”

“You said,” I replied, “that you could go with him to the foot of the gallows if his duty led him there.”

“Well, now, if you have the courage to do what you have said, I will take your arm and go with you, on foot, if need be, through the streets, to the police station. On the day when you must stand before the court to answer for your wrong, I will stand there by your side. Afterwards, if I may not, as your wife,

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share your prison cell, I will hold your hand through the iron bars. I will spend every cent of my fortune, if need be, to help you. If they send you to the state's prison, I will move heaven and earth for your pardon. If I do not succeed, I will be at the prison gate on the day when your term expires, and I will go out into the world by your side and help you fight the battle of life, until death us do part."

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CHAPTER XVI.

A LETTER RETURNED.

I hope the intelligent reader will not need to be told that a cool, wary man of affairs, like me, could not really have the slightest intention of surrendering to the police, if it could be helped. I had, in fact, made the offer as a threat—to make her feel she was going too far. The frequenters of the Rock Crystal would have called the move a “bluff.” The ignominious failure of it distressed me greatly. I staggered back to the bench, sat down, covered my face with my hands and groaned aloud. Judith came and sat beside me. She took my hands and drew them down.

“It is an awful ordeal for you, George dear. I am not unmindful of that; but perhaps the Lord is showing you an open door to a better life. ‘My ways are not your ways, saith the Lord.’”

“Yes,” I said, “an awful ordeal—as you say. It is quite wonderful to observe the fortitude with which some people can contemplate an ordeal like that—when other people have to undergo it. Am I to suppose you have hunted me down, have caught me and caged me, that you might have the pleasure of my company to the police station?”

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"Did I misunderstand you? Surely you proposed it? Was it not you who said that life and liberty had not enough sweetness to tempt you to receive them at my hands? Was it not you who asked the man yonder the way to the nearest lock-up? Oh—I almost began to hope the man I loved really had an existence."

"Yes, yes, I said it. I am half wild and I ought not to be held bound by all the extraordinary things I may say. Have you considered that what you ask me to do does not mean disgrace alone, but death? Have you thought of Gilbert and Beulah?"

"Gilbert? I do not know Gilbert. Beulah is the name of your sister, but—I do not know what you mean."

"Oh well, Gilbert is a sort of family nickname for my brother Charles. We often called him Gilbert—I forget how it began. As to what you propose, I do not deny there would be heroism in it—just the sort of sentimental heroism, in fact, to appeal to a man of my temperament; but for a man to send his brother and sister to jail, while he shows off before the world as a hero, would be to carry things rather far, would it not?"

I suppose she had not thought of it in that light, for she did not reply at once. At length she said:

"But you said something about death. What did you mean?"

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What I meant was that Gilbert would kill me if he even suspected that I intended to confess to the authorities; but of course I could not explain that to her. My mention of his name was a blunder—not the least of several blunders I had recently made; and this was the more to be regretted because it led me on to add one more lie to the long list of my sins.

“What did I mean by death? It should be clear enough. My sister would kill herself rather than endure the shame of seeing me sent to jail on a criminal charge. Are you aware, furthermore, that the part she has played in this business must make her *particeps criminis*, in contemplation of the law? Whatever you may think of my brother and sister, I cannot forget that they have been as father and mother to me.”

“And your sister loves you very dearly? And she might die of grief? It is easy to believe it. If her distress could be so extreme when she knew you only pretended to be dead, one shudders— Was that really what you meant when you spoke of death?”

“What else could I mean?”

“I do not know what else you could mean,” she said wearily. “So far I have failed to discover any meaning in anything you have done or said—except that you are the most consummate hypocrite alive.”

She rose and stood by the end of the bench.

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"To think," she said, with a little, mirthless laugh, "that there are people who deny the good old Baptist doctrine of total depravity. Well, I have no right to constitute myself adviser for the Ward family—even though, as to one member of it, I offered to purchase the right at something of a sacrifice; but the offer is rejected, it seems. Let it go. I am tired of all this. And now, Mr. George William Ward, give me your attention for a moment. I am about to favor you with another short speech—the last, I think, you will ever hear from my lips."

There was a plenty of color in her cheeks now, and a bright, angry look in her eyes.

"I have been a fool," she said, "and must pay the price of folly, like other fools. When I discovered that the man who now lies buried yonder in Janeville was not you, I employed an agent to seek you. I sent him to find a man I loved and honored above all other men. He found, instead, a thief. No, keep your seat. The word does you no wrong as you well know. He found, as I say, a thief—a murderer too, no doubt—I dared not inquire into the mystery of yonder poor body. Yesterday I stood between you and danger. You well know how, and where. I did it at some cost of self-respect—if you could but comprehend the fact. I even put my good old father to the torture and wrung his dear, loving heart; God

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forgive me. Why? I suppose the sufficient reason is that, I am a woman. To-day, being a woman, I offered to become a felon's wife, if so I might help him to lead a better life. It was a safe offer, as it turned out, but I meant it with all my soul. Well, there are some things I will not do, even for you. I am perhaps a foolish woman in your eyes—I am one in my own; but I am an honest one, wise or foolish. As my Creator will bear witness, I have never, in all my life, coveted aught that was my neighbor's. I draw the line of my folly at the point which separates honesty from dishonesty. In this case I have knowledge of a conspiracy to rob, and I will not connive at a felony, though I may save the felon. You have a clear head, if not a clean heart, and you know that if I allow this crime to be consummated, having power to prevent it, I become what you just now described as *particeps criminis*—is not that the right phrase? This, now, is my final word. You shall not commit this crime if I can prevent it. I need say no more to one so astute. Save yourself and your accomplices in any way that seems good to you, but the insurance people must be released from your supposed claims against them; and I must know that it is done. Then you may go your way, and I pray God I may never meet you again in this world."

She waved me aside from the path and went toward

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the house; the door opened and closed behind her, and I was left to the uncongenial society of the red-haired man.

Crushed, helpless, undone! Danger in the very air about me. I sat there idly, feeling there was urgent need to do something, yet unable to think of anything to do. I do not know how long I sat there—several hours probably, for it was noon when the man touched me on the shoulder and signed for me to follow him into the house.

In my room a lunch had been prepared for me; I ate it with a sort of stupid wonder that I could eat at all, finding a sort of idiotic pleasure in comparing myself to a soldier living off the enemy, in the enemy's country. When the meal was ended and the man had cleared the table, leaving me alone in the room, I forced myself to look the situation squarely in the face. I took myself grimly to task for the almost unaccountable series of blunders I had perpetrated that morning.

In the first place, I had committed that fatal error which the wisest of men commit in dealing with women: I had taken Judith at her word when she was angry, allowing her to leave me in that abrupt way, when I should have detained her—surely an easy thing for a man of my adroitness—until the interview could be brought to some more satisfactory conclusion. True, she was by no means an ordinary woman;

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she was, in fact, a very superior woman; yet she was a woman.

In the second place, I had missed a golden opportunity when she so unexpectedly acquiesced in my offer to surrender to the police. The ridiculous, undignified haste with which I had tried to extricate myself from that dilemma could not but lower me in her estimation. I should have "stood pat," as we used to say at the Rock Crystal, making some slight amendment to the offer, involving some little delay. What I needed now, above all things, was time. Plainly, I had made an ass of myself. Let me say that the man who has the grace to make that kind of admission, to himself, is by no means asinine, paradoxical as the statement may appear.

I resolved to make what haste I could to correct the blunder, inwardly praying it might not be too late. Fortunately there were writing materials in the room, and then and there I composed the letter which is given below. The reader will presently know how it happens that I can reproduce it here:

"My Darling:—

I feel that I have neither wit, nor worth, neither action, nor the power of words, to express in any adequate way my sense of the strength, purity and nobility of your character as revealed to me in our interview this morning. In all humility and lowliness of heart, I admit that in courage, in honor, in force of character—in all things which belong to

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real worth and goodness, you are as high above me as the heavens are high above the earth. When I think of the events of to-day and yesterday, I am crushed to the ground by a sense of my own unworthiness. Can it be that an unkind fate has separated us for time and for eternity? My very soul quakes at the thought; yet if it be so, I shall carry your dear image in my heart while I live—yea, after I have ceased to live in this world. Darling, I know I must appear very weak and cowardly to you; but try, I beseech you, to feel some compassion for a sorely tempted man, beset by awful perils. I pray you to believe that when I appeared before you this morning, I seemed, to myself, utterly friendless and forlorn; I felt as a wolf at bay, who must fight for life and liberty or be pulled down and destroyed. Is it any wonder that, unnerved, terrified, despairing, I made the mistakes which such as I invariably make under such circumstances? In my abject terror and misery, is it any wonder I could not rise to your moral level? Alas, how could that be possible? Yet, now I perceive you were right; your way was the one right way open for me. To undo the wrong, if possible; to prevent further wrong—certainly that was the right way—the Lord's way. Now, your noble offer to share my shame and disgrace touches my very heart, my very soul, and utterly subdues the selfish coward within me. Well beloved, I will do as you say. I promise it here, over my sign manual. Yet, I have now an appeal to make to you, as to the only one who can help me, in my extremity. I cry out to you as a drowning man may cry among the billows. Behold how bitter is the cup I must drink, if I do this thing! I doubt if you, even you, can realize its exceeding bitterness. Will you come to my aid? Will you yet stand by me, as you offered? Will you not, for God's sake, do even more? May I not call you wife before my awful crucifixion begins—before I don that dreadful, infamous livery of shame? From the altar I will go to the sheriff and submit to whatever the out-

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raged laws of my country may inflict. Selfish, yes, utterly selfish is the request I make, but I pray you to remember what moral coward it is that makes it. Henceforth, if he have any strength at all, it must come from God and from you. I need you by my side lest I fall again under the influence of those who first tempted me. Sweetheart, will you not answer this at once, as I would have it answered? Do this for the sake of the unfortunate being whose one redeeming virtue is that he loves you and is able to appreciate your transcendent worth.

Yours till death,"

"George William Ward."

Just now, when I re-read this letter, with a view to copying it here, my eyes grew moist, even as on the day when it was first written. If ever I put heart, mind and soul into any work of a literary character, I put them into the composition of this paper. It went to its destination that afternoon, carried by Jason McCurdy. I was not as depraved as the reader may imagine from the perusal of these pages. I was only desperate, driven into a corner, compelled to fight for life. For, let it be remembered, this was an issue of life and death with me. To betray Gilbert was of itself no light matter, as I well knew. Moreover, I was deeply implicated in the killing of the man at El Agua, although not intentionally so. It would be exceedingly hard for me to explain my connection with that matter, in any court of justice, so as to escape conviction as an accessory. The unraveling of this case in all its complications, was not to be thought

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of. But I meant no harm to Judith. I loved her. Let that be understood. I never for one moment intended to wrong her in any way. Yes, I was aware of my marriage with Beulah when I wrote the missive. But I argued that Judith, having gained her point on the main contention, might perhaps yield a little on minor points. I would plead with her, for at least a brief engagement—a little period of paradise before entering prison, that hell on earth. I thought she might grant me that. This would give me the opportunity to deal with Gilbert, and a chance to show him and Beulah that marriage with Judith was necessary to the safety of all of us. A divorce could be obtained quietly, and then I could marry Judith.

I admit that, in one respect, there was treason in my heart against her, from her point of view. Once married, I should refuse outright to do anything so absurd and childish as to send myself to the state's prison. Treacherous, no doubt, as some people may view it. Yet it was a treachery which, as I verily believed, would prevent the wrecking of two lives—hers and mine. As to the insurance companies? Well I could not do much for them, under the circumstances; but I had resolved not to touch any of the money myself. In fact, I relied upon my renunciation in that matter as a trump card, so to speak, with Beulah and Gilbert. Beulah might take it as alimony, if she chose.

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The paltry money was nothing to me, when weighed against my deep love for Judith.

So much by way of explanation. The reader can accept it or let it go. Let that man who, in my condition, would have acted otherwise, cast the first stone at me. I am aware I cannot strike any very high moral attitude here, and I am not going to try. I can only give my word, for what it may be worth. I had no thought of harming Judith. I think I would have deceived her, for her own good. I leave it all with Him who planted the instinct of self-preservation in the human heart.

Late that afternoon McCurdy returned and handed me an unsealed envelope containing two papers. One was my own letter returned—which explains how I have been able to reproduce it. It lies here on my desk. On the outside of the last sheet, hardly decipherable now, are the following words, written with a lead pencil in Judith's handwriting:

"If you will take the trouble to read the document inclosed herewith, you will perhaps understand why I must decline to accept the very high honor you have offered me.

JUDITH WYMORE."

The other paper proved to be a letter addressed to McCurdy. On the date line was the name of a town—Pinktown, Iowa. The moment I saw that ill-omened word I knew the scoundrelly spy had played me another

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scurvy trick. It was the most dastardly blow of all, for it dashed the cup of happiness from my lips forever. I gnashed my teeth and said in my heart, "May the Lord do so and so to me, and more also, if I make not this a sorry day's work for this villain!" A wild, vain threat, which the Lord would not let me fulfill. Here is the letter:

"Dear Mac:

Things have panned out here better than I expected. I congratulate you on your idea of looking into the matter of the visit of the Ward family to this place just before the disappearance of 'Brother George'. They put up at the very hotel where I am staying. I showed the landlady a photograph of George, and gave her a description of the charming Beulah. When she saw the picture she exclaimed:

'Yes, yes, I remember him! Well, I should say! That is the Missouri bridegroom who fainted!'

"This was a stunner. But it was even so. At the court house here there is the returned marriage license, the date corresponding with the date of their visit. However, the name of the bridegroom is not Ward at all, but Michael Carmichael; and the name of the bride is not Ward, but Miss Beulah Gilbert. I called upon the minister who married them. After I had refreshed his memory by showing him the picture, he remembered the case perfectly, and referred to the fainting of the bridegroom—the only instance of that kind he had ever seen or heard of. I suppose it is true enough; he did faint—and small blame to him. The parson showed me his own record of the marriage of Mr. Michael Carmichael to Miss Beulah Gilbert. Date corresponds with the day of their visit here. Of course the story of the fainting fit helped to fix the matter in the minds of several people

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about the place, so that I have been able to corroborate the description of the parties. When I go to Janeville, I shall be able to compare notes with the person from whom they hired the team. I go tomorrow and will await further orders there. How does this strike you? Developing rather queer features, is it not?

Yours truly,"

"J. H. KING."

"You appear to be a little upset," said McCurdy, when I had finished. "Enough to upset a man of better nerve. Though, candidly, there is not much the matter with your nerve. Considering the nature of the letter you sent to the young lady to-day, there is certainly nothing wrong with your nerve. I should have said the contents of my partner's letter might very well upset even a man of *your* coolness."

"Did she show you my letter?" I demanded.

"No, no. Not at all—not at all. She returned it by me in an unsealed envelope, along with King's letter. I read it in the street car, on my way home. Not very honorable, eh? Well, if you're a stickler for honor, I am ready to apologize, I am sure."

No use to quarrel with him. I asked him to let me keep King's letter and he consented, as this was only a typewritten copy of the original, made for Judith.

He then told me, he had consented, with great reluctance, for a consideration, to steer me clear of the penitentiary, if it could be done, on condition that I must give up all attempts on the insurance people,

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both for myself and Gilbert. He frankly admitted he had done his best to persuade Judith to let him put me "behind the bars," not that he had any grudge against me, but because the case, if given the publicity he thought it deserved, would be a "feather in his cap," and a great advantage to his business. All his arguments availed nothing, even after the receipt of his partner's letter. He said, he had pointed out to her the probability that a darker crime than swindling lay back of the affair; but, while she admitted that I was depraved enough for anything, she declared that no punishment inflicted upon me could restore the dead to life.

"I never break faith with a client," he said, in conclusion. "She pays me for my help and I am very much at your service. But if I am to be of use, you must give me a plain, unvarnished history of this whole affair. Tell me about the people with whom you are associated, for it is clear they are not your brother and sister. Whose body is this you have buried, and how did you come into possession of it? It is for you to say, of course, how far you will trust me, but it may be well for you to remember that I already know a good deal to your detriment, so that a little more will not matter much to you. I can advise you better if I know the facts."

I asked him to give me time to consider and he

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readily consented. Next morning, after breakfast, he came to my room and I told him as much of my story as I could. I told him nothing about Gopher City and my reasons for leaving there. I admitted the conspiracy, but I did not give him any account of the El Agua end of the affair. I said our plan at first contemplated the finding of a body, to be procured in some way, to be dressed in my clothes, with the features mutilated beyond recognition. That part of the programme was left in Gilbert's hands, to be attended to after my disappearance. I said that Gilbert had visited a hospital in Kansas City to see a man who was thought to resemble me. The resemblance was so great that, when the man died, Gilbert had him exhumed from the potter's field. The man had been found in a north-end alley, with the injuries upon his body already described. I said I had no doubt it was young Wickham. I told him Gilbert had saved my life, which fact accounted for his influence over me, at first. Then I gave him a very complete and circumstantial account of the way I had been entrapped into a marriage with Beulah. I wished him, or rather Judith, through him, to know the truth of that scandalous outrage. Also I was, I confess, so forlorn, for the time being, so heart-sick, that I yearned for sympathy—the sympathy of a dog would have been grateful to me. Spy and informer as he was, I should

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have been glad of even McCurdy's compassion. In this dark, treacherous affair there had been at least one thing wherein I had suffered gross wrong, one matter in which I had been more sinned against than sinning. But the only effect of my story upon McCurdy was to make him laugh. He laughed so long and so loud that I felt utterly disgusted at his coarseness and brutality. I could not see the joke then, and I have never been able to discover it since.

CROSSING THE RIVER.

CHAPTER XVII.

CROSSING THE RIVER.

McCurdy listened patiently to my story. When it was finished, I could see, or imagined I could see, that he was much impressed either by the matter or the manner of it.

“You tell your tale very well,” he said, “as I expected you would, when I gave you time to prepare it. Some of it is true, I dare say, though, of course, I cannot say how much. I would give something to know the truth about that poor fellow they found in the box. Never mind. I know enough to enable me to advise you.

“In my opinion, the best thing you can do is to go to your accomplices and tell them exactly how the case stands. That should be sufficient. They will abandon the game when they know they must. There is an opportunity for your alleged brother to play the part of the high-minded, Christian gentleman. He will know how to do that, to the queen’s taste. He will not press for payment of his policies, not because he has any doubt of the justness of his claim, but because he fears people will talk, on account of the proceedings here. He never did want his brother to in-

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sure his life anyway—tried hard to keep him from it, in fact. Maybe the companies will believe him, maybe not; but they will accept his policies, if he will return them, and let it go at that. If they give you no trouble, nobody else will. Do you see?”

“I see. You think this is the best way. What, in your opinion, would be the next best?”

“The next way will prove more difficult. You will have to open negotiations with the companies yourself. They might agree, for the sake of the information you could give them, to keep you out of the pen—if possible. Some of them might even put up a little money if you consent to give up your partners in iniquity.”

“How much do you suppose they might put up?” I asked.

“I have no idea. Am not sure they would give one cent; they might think they had been extremely liberal in saving you from the penitentiary. Hard thing to manage—difficult and dangerous; better try the other way.”

“Very well,” I said, “only, I warn you, if the first way fails, the other never will be tried—by me.”

“No? Why?”

“If you knew Gilbert you would not ask why. Dead people cannot try experiments—on this side of the river.”



BEFORE I HAD TIME TO CRY OUT A WORD OF WARNING THE BLOW FELL.— PAGE 296.

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“Nonsense, my friend, sheer nonsense. You should know better than that, by your own experience. Your criminal is always a coward, all blood-and-thunder novels to the contrary notwithstanding. Sometimes, I grant you, under sudden impulse of terror and despair, the law-breaker may do desperate things. But give your friend time for the cold palsy to creep in—the cold palsy that strikes in to the marrow of the bones, as the grim, passionless grip of the law is felt at the throat of the malefactor; let him feel his feet entangled in the iron meshes of society’s drag-net, and he will become as tame as a sucking dove. Never fear.”

“As you please,” I said; “but beware of overmuch confidence in theories when you deal with Gilbert. The exception which proves the rule may occur at any moment. If I have to go to that man, on this errand, I would rather have a bullet-proof coat for my protection than any fine spun theories about the cowardice of the criminal classes. I tell you, if this plan fails, there will be no other for me, this side of the ‘jasper walls.’ Do you advise me to go to Gilbert before he leaves St. Brandan?”

“He left St. Brandan this morning. I suppose he will write to you. You should return to your lodging and wait there to hear from him. But please remem-

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ber, your every movement will be watched. If you try to play any tricks—so much the worse for you.”

“Am I to understand,” I said indignantly, “that this whole business is known to your spies—beg pardon, employes?”

“You are to understand that my people know nothing about you. Mr. King, whose letter you read, is my partner in business. You have nothing to fear from him—if you play fair with me.”

Several letters passed between me and Gilbert, within the next ten days. McCurdy saw all the letters, of course, and dictated those I sent. My first letter made known to my co-conspirators all that had happened and the consequent necessity of abandoning the whole enterprise. Very much to the gratification of McCurdy, and also very much to my surprise, Gilbert’s letter in reply was a frank acknowledgment of defeat. It was even cheerful in tone. Among other things, he said:

“It appears we have played our small game and are beaten. That is all there is to it. Let me know at once what your friend Mac wishes me to do. Am very much at his service, ready to accommodate him to any reasonable extent. I say this the more cheerfully because I recognize, in our adversary, a man of brains. I feel less humiliation in surrendering to a man like that.”

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"Tell him," said McCurdy. "I require a written history of this whole conspiracy, properly drawn, and signed by both of you. I will place that in the hands of Miss Wymore, and you and your friends may go where you will."

I then suggested that this was rather hard on us, as it left documentary proof of our secret to pass through the hands of himself, his partner King, and Judith.

"Young man," he said, drily, "it is written somewhere, 'Whatsoever a man sows that shall he also reap.' I am not here to guarantee that this particular crop, sown by you and your accomplices, will be pleasant to reap. But at least you have here a choice of harvests, in which respect you are better off than others who sow the same kind of grain. Begin now and reap, one way or the other, for the harvest time is surely come."

I wrote to Gilbert, who, in turn, wrote and proposed a meeting to settle all details. As he did not want to come to St. Brandan, and as I could not go to Janeville, it was finally arranged that we meet at Calypso, Missouri. He urged several reasons why he wished us to meet him there. In that neighborhood lived an old friend—one of the few thoroughly honest friends he had. The man was an old, ex-Confederate soldier whose life Gilbert had saved. Under his roof

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we could meet and part, and no questions would be asked by our entertainer. All else he left in our hands; the only boon he would ask was that he should surrender, since he must surrender, with this old, tried friend near him.

It was a gloomy, sultry day when we left St. Brandan for Calypso. For hours our train bore us onward, sometimes through showers of rain, sometimes through bright sunshine. The sun was disappearing behind the hills, when we left the cars at Calypso, a wretched place, containing not more than half a dozen houses. Gilbert was waiting for us and when the train moved away, he shook me warmly by the hand, apparently much rejoiced to see me. I introduced McCurdy.

"We may shake hands, I hope," said Gilbert, "if only to show we have no ill will."

There was not a living soul visible about the place, except the members of our party. Gilbert led the way to where three horses were hitched to a rack near the station. We mounted and rode away, in the direction of some heavy timber which lay south of the railroad track. As we proceeded along the dim way I observed that the tops of the trees seemed aflame with the light of the setting sun. Gilbert rode by the side of McCurdy, while I followed some distance in the rear.

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"By the way," I heard him say, "I met a friend of yours in Janeville—man named King. As he seemed anxious to see you, I persuaded him to come along. He is at my friend's house with my sister. Both wanted to come to meet you, but there were only three horses."

"I was just thinking of King," said McCurdy, with a laugh. "Glad you persuaded him to come."

Presently we came to a river—no matter what river. The twilight was fading rapidly when we halted, for a moment, at the ford. I could dimly see the road where it emerged, at a point diagonally across the stream, below the place where we must enter. Gilbert examined the banks above and below.

"It is about two hours since I crossed, and the river was rising then. I think it is rising now. It is always well to be careful about these mountain streams. They are never very muddy, whether high or low; and they are always swift. Sometimes they rise very suddenly from rains far up in the hills, and it is not always easy for a man not thoroughly familiar with them to tell whether they are safe. However I hardly think the water here will be high enough to compel the horses to swim. In any case, remember the animals are used to swimming. If you have no experience in guiding horses under such circumstances, let them alone. Do not pull on the reins, and keep your feet out of the

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water, if you can. Gilbert and McCurdy entered first; by the time I was ready to start I saw that both their horses were swimming. I noticed that, when McCurdy drew up his feet to keep them from the water, they still remained in the stirrups, his feet being rather large and the stirrups rather small. I noticed also, with some surprise, that the two entered the river almost side by side—an unsafe thing to do, it seemed to me, especially as Gilbert's horse, which was on the up-stream side, was drifting down in such a way that a collision seemed inevitable. In a little while not more than a couple of feet separated the two, McCurdy being a little in advance. Suddenly, Gilbert shifted his reins to his right hand. He made a movement with his left, which at first I did not understand. A little later he raised his arm, I saw a dull gleam of metal, and perceived that he had drawn a revolver. McCurdy had seen neither movement, being intent upon the management of his horse. Before I had time to cry out a word of warning, the blow fell. The heavy weapon came down with crushing force, and, without a cry or a groan, the man rolled out of his saddle and fell into the river. His foot, on the down stream side, slipped out of the stirrup, but the other held; the stirrup leather was thus drawn across the saddle so that McCurdy hung with his head in the water. The fall of the rider confused the horse; he plunged a little,

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changed his course, and swam straight down the stream, dragging the half-submerged body of the spy. My memory retains a very vivid impression of that scene—the gathering darkness, the rushing river, the high banks on either side, the green trees arching toward each other from opposite shores, the horse swimming gallantly away into the gloom below, the man hanging with one leg across the saddle.

In the contemplation of that dreadful scene I had for the moment, neglected to attend to my own safety. We were now approaching the other shore. In fact Gilbert's horse had already found a footing, though fully ten feet from the dry land, and his saddle girth was out of the water. I now discovered, to my great alarm, that my horse had drifted so far it was doubtful if he would make the landing. I turned his head more up stream, and the intelligent creature seemed to understand the situation. Right here the current ran with unusual swiftness, yet, for a moment, we appeared to gain a little; then we seemed to be stationary. By this time Gilbert had reached the shore and had turned to look at me.

“Help, for God's sake!” I shouted.

“Give my compliments to your friend McCurdy, if you meet him again,” was the mocking reply, “or rather when you meet him again. Tell him his friend

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King is not lost, but gone before—gone to the place where all good people of his vocation go.”

He raised his hand—the hand which still held the weapon with which he had struck his unfortunate victim. A little circle of red fire seemed to flicker about the muzzle, but if there was any report I did not hear it. I felt a sensation as if some one had stabbed me, through and through, with a rough, jagged icicle. I did not quite lose consciousness, for I remember thinking what a long, long distance it was to the bottom of the river and, after my feet struck the hard, rocky bottom, what a long, long distance it was to the top. I had not thought the ocean could be so deep. The abnormal quickness of the human mind, under such conditions, has often been mentioned. I verified it in my own case, for in the few seconds of my submersion, I convinced myself, by a logical chain of reasoning, that I could not be fatally hurt—could not be dying at least, because a dead man, or a dying man, would not be so interested in the depth of the water. I am not so sure of the soundness of this reasoning now, but it comforted me then.

It was well for me I was a good swimmer and had the diver's instinct to hold my breath when I fell. Luckily, the water was not cold. I fell into the stream close to the side on which my would-be assassin stood; this, as it chanced, was a circumstance—a providential

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circumstance, in my favor. For there was a high, rocky bank on his right, as he stood facing the ford, and the stream curved round it in such a way that, beyond it, he could not see the surface close in shore. I came up with such force that half my body was projected out of the water, so that he must have seen me if the current had not borne me below, and around, this point. Naturally I gasped for breath the moment my head emerged; and of course some of the water which streamed over my face was drawn into my wind-pipe; but the noise of the stream, as it ran between the high ledges of rock on either side, together with the noise of the evening wind among the trees, drowned the sound of the coughing I could not avoid. The man who has learned to swim will swim instinctively when thrown into water of sufficient depth. As for me, although this world is all a fleeting show for man's illusion given, I could not resign it without a struggle, however hopeless the struggle might seem. Within a few feet, at my right, the high, precipitous ledges slipped by. In some places they overhung the river, but nowhere did they offer a foothold, or a point that could be grasped. Bushes grew in crevices, here and there, but always too high for me to reach. By the lingering remnant of the twilight, I could see that the other shore was much like this one; in any case, with my failing strength, I dared not risk the struggle with

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that terrible current, which an attempt to cross would render necessary. I knew I was wounded badly, if not fatally; that I must be losing blood; that my only chance lay in husbanding my strength; so I limited my exertions to keeping my head above the water, allowing the stream to carry me where it would.

Presently the direction of the current changed, setting in toward the other side. I was wondering if I could possibly hold out long enough, when something loomed darkly before me. I thrust out my hand and touched the side of a horse. It was the one from which I had fallen. My touch frightened him, and he plunged a little; but he became quiet when I spoke to him soothingly. I did not try to get upon his back, but caught him by the tail and let him tow me. It was time. I believe I could not have kept my head above water for five minutes longer. I now observed we were being carried round a bend in the stream. It seemed to me also we were coming to a place where the banks were low, where bushes grew close to the water's edge. In fact, a little tributary brook entered the river just here. Along the bank on either side the ground was level and covered with bushes. The high water of the larger stream had filled the channel of the smaller with backwater, flooding the low ground, so that only the tops of the brushwood were visible. The horse had sense enough to make for this

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place. He was well in among the branches before his feet touched bottom. Beyond the bushes the banks of the tributary were tolerably steep, but not so steep the horse could not climb them. I let go of him before he made the attempt. I caught hold of a bush and found I could touch bottom, the water being up to my shoulders. When the animal got to the top of the bank, I followed him, dragging myself up by shrubs and roots of trees. There were black, blue and green spots dancing before my eyes. At the top I sat down with my back against a tree, and resolutely fought off a feeling of sickness and faintness, feeling sure that if I gave way to it I must bleed to death. I took off my upper garments, rolled my undershirt into a ball and pressed it against my wounded side. Just then the horse, which had been eating grass near by, approached to within three feet of where I sat. The reins of his bridle had slipped over his head and hung dangling within reach of my hand. I caught them, led the beast close to me, and removed the bridle. I turned my injured side to the tree and pressed the wadded shirt between it and my body, to hold the bandage in its place, while I cut the reins from the bridle. I took the reins and bound the bandage to my side as well as I could, the leather, softened by the water, lending itself to my purpose very well. I then put on my outer shirt and coat, and got upon my feet with some

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dim idea of finding my way out of the woods. I could not cross the brook, so I turned my back to it, staggered off into the woods, fell, and lost consciousness before I had gone a hundred yards.

I think I was delirious most of the night, for I seemed to enact, over and over again, the dreadful scenes through which I had just passed. Yet it may be that I had some natural sleep before morning, for I awoke—or returned to consciousness—to find the sun shining. I was in the midst of a rather dense cluster of bushes, but not far away I could see, through an opening right before my face, a small clearing on which two horses were grazing. One of them I knew for my old friend, who had towed me out of the river. The other was the one McCurdy had ridden. Its saddle was gone, and in that simple fact I read another page of the tragedy. The man's weight had at last broken the girth, and horse and rider had parted company forever.

I wondered whether I had strength to reach the horses and whether, in any case, it would be wise to attempt to ride one of them out of the woods. Before I could make up my mind, fate decided for me. There appeared on the scene two boys, long-legged, hickory-shirted, freckled-faced fellows, the older about sixteen, the other about thirteen.

"Pap hit her fust shot!" exclaimed the younger lad.

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"He said he bet the hosses 'ud swim out at the mouth of Peavine crick."

"What yer ole man don't know 'bout hosses ain't wuth knowin'," said the other. "But they's one saddle gone and one bridle."

"Reckon Pap'll make Mister Gilbert pay fur 'em?"

"Naw. He don't charge no old friend of his'n fur no bridle, nor fur no saddle nuther. 'Twan't Mister Gilbert's fault. How could he he'p these here No'th Missouri ignoramusses not knowin' how to ride a hoss acrost a river?"

The boys transferred the bridle from McCurdy's horse to the one with the saddle. While effecting the transfer, the younger asked:

"Say, Jep, whar do you reckon them two pore fellers is now?"

"How kin I tell? How kin anybody tell? I heard Mister Gilbert tell Ma, he had reason to b'lieve the young feller was one of the elect—though he wa'n't no professor. Said he warn't shore about the St. Brandan chap. Ain't no tellin' whar he's at."

"Shucks! I don't mean that. I mean whar do you reckon their bodies is?"

"Purty well down to the Osage by now, I 'spect. This ole river's mighty swift, when she's up."

Soon they disappeared, riding one horse and driv-

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ing the other before them. Evidently Gilbert had led them to believe we had been drowned accidentally.

A shadow drifted across the ground before me. I looked up, and saw a large vulture sailing above the tree-tops. Then the words of Fitz-Eustace's song came back to me:

"Her wing shall the eagle flap,
O'er the false-hearted;
His warm blood the wolf shall lap,
E're life be parted!"

Certainly the American turkey buzzard is not an eagle; yet, to all intents and purposes, he might very well represent the idea in Scott's mind when he wrote that song. I began to wonder—to try to remember whether I had read of wolves in Southern Missouri.

I was weak—very weak—and so thirsty. I thought I might try to crawl to the river and get a drink of its clear water. I could hear its gentle murmur within a stone's throw of me and I tried to move, but my temples began to throb and chills passed over my body. I believe I went out of my head for a while.

A succession of sharp sounds aroused me at last. I thought some one was firing a cannon close by, but I found the noise came from a remarkably ugly, yellow dog, who stood barking at me a few feet away. He annoyed me. I wanted him to move on, yet I could only lie and stare at him. Then came another

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sound. This time it was a human voice—a very soft, pleasant, drawling voice, such as nobody ever hears except from the lips of an old-time, “before-the-war” darky.

“Why, honey! Why, de lan’ er goodness! What’s de marter wid you, white man? Well—de good lan’!”

After one or two trials I managed to articulate, “Water—water!”

“To be sho’—to be sho’. I’ll git yo’ some water, chile;” and he went away. It seemed an age before he returned, but he came at last with a bucket of water, and accompanied by a kind-looking Negro woman.

They gave me water from a gourd—an old gourd which had been cracked and sewn together with a thread. The water was fresh and cold. Then they examined my wound. When she saw the blood-soaked bandage, bound to my side with the leather strap, the old woman cried out:

“Bless de chile! He’s done to’ in two wid er cannon ball!”

“Not so bad as that, aunty,” I said, “but bad enough to die, unless you can help me. Is there any house near, to which you can take me?”

“Sho’ly—sho’ly,” said the old man. “Dey ain’ no white folks’ house closer’n a mile an’ a half. I don’t spec’ you could stan’ it to go dar—could you?”

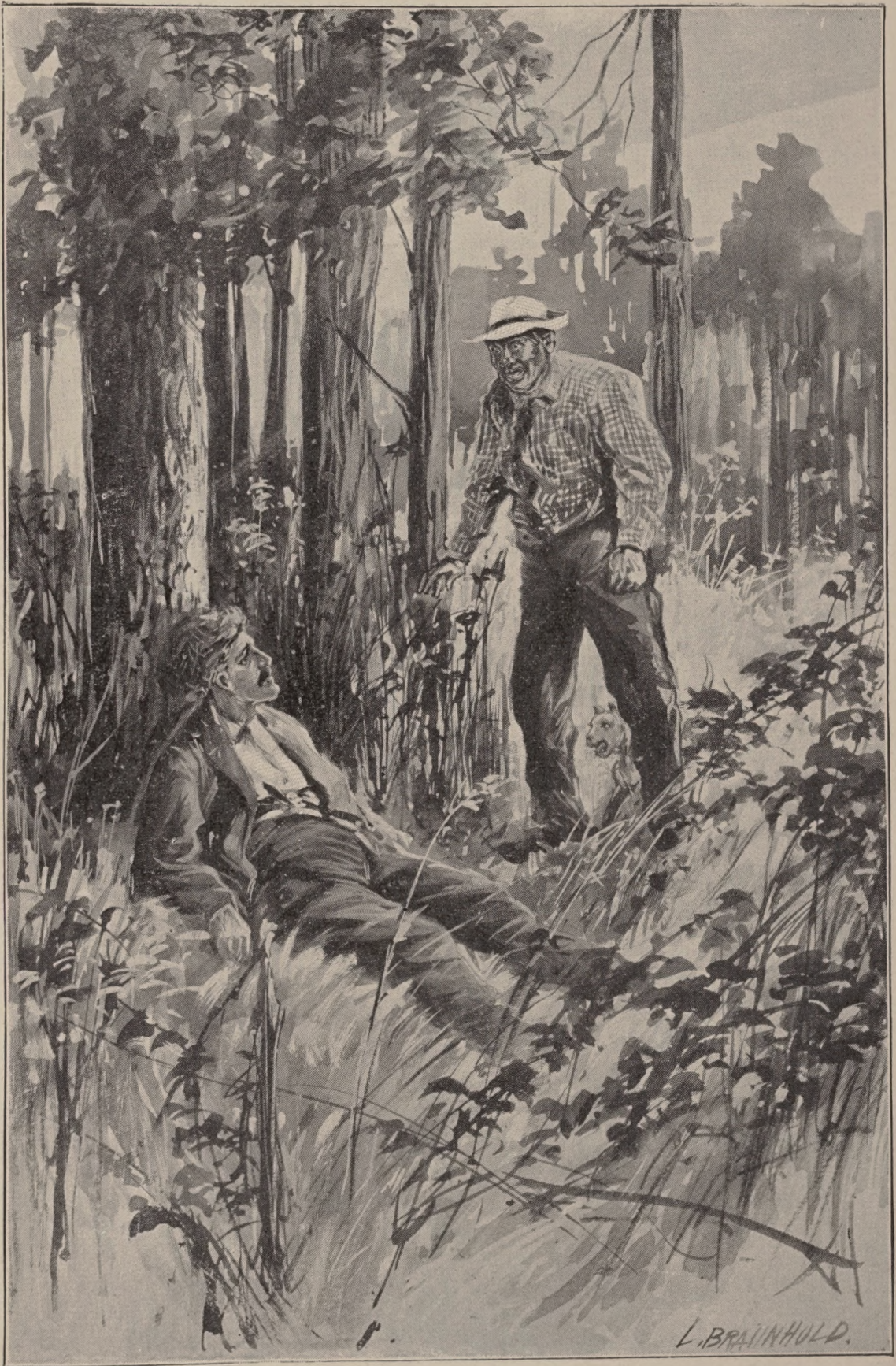
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"No," I said, "not if there is any other place any closer. Get me somewhere—anywhere, so I can get this wound dressed and have a bed."

"Melindy," said the old man, "stay right here en keep de flies off'n dis yere white man, twel I go hitch de mule to de little wagon. We got ter tote him to our house en do de bes' we kin foh him. We ain' none er dese yer Levites whut pass by on turrer side, when dey's a man in trouble."

So these black Samaritans carried me to their lowly home and ministered unto me. They laid me upon a bed and dressed my hurt, which, thank Heaven, was not as bad as I had feared. The bullet had ploughed a very ugly furrow along my side, grazing one of my ribs. No artery, or other large blood vessel had been injured, yet I should have bled to death but for my clumsy bandage. As it was, I did not recover for a long time.

The old negro was a preacher for the other negroes of that neighborhood—and a good man I found him to be; and his wife was a most excellent nurse. He prayed for me, night and morning, at my own particular request. As I would naturally be expected to give some account of myself, I told my black benefactors that I was a young man who, like that other man who journeyed from Jerusalem to Jericho, had



THIS TIME IT WAS A HUMAN VOICE. — PAGE 305.

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fallen among thieves; that my wicked companions, after leading me astray, had tried to kill me; for which reasons I wished to escape from them and from their influence forever. All this was true as gospel. I certainly had enough, and more than enough, of Gilbert and Beulah; and as Gilbert had reason to believe me dead, I might hope never to see them again in this world; and I was resolved so to live, henceforth, that there would be no danger of meeting them in the world to come.

The kind old darky prayed for me, and his wife nursed me. I do not doubt the efficacy of both ministrations. When I got up from that bed I was, by the grace of Heaven, a changed man. Regarding me as a brand plucked from the burning, largely through his own prayers, the negro readily promised to keep all knowledge of my presence from the white people in the neighborhood. This was not difficult. No white people came near the place while I was there. Negroes came, but, with the characteristic secretiveness of their race, they respected their pastor's wishes. I had not lost my money in the river, and, hence, was able to reward my preservers liberally—though at first they refused to take money for their services.

When I was able to travel, the man showed me the

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way to Calypso. At that lonely little station, one dark night, I boarded a train, unobserved by any of the people there, and went to Kansas City. From there I came, in course of time, to my old home here in Tudorville.

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CHAPTER XVIII.

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Altogether I was in the home of my benefactors a little more than a month. During that time the history of the world, beyond the precincts of that humble cabin, was a blank to me. I arrived in Kansas City on the morning of August the second. The first thing I did, after my arrival, was to get my breakfast; the second, was to go to the public library to look over the files of the daily newspapers. From the newspaper files I learned, for the first time, what had happened to Gilbert.

It was a favorite doctrine of that cruel, wicked man, that whatever happens in the life of a man, has been decreed before the foundation of the world. I have often wondered whether, in the place to which he has gone, he finds any comfort in knowing how wonderfully the facts in his own case seem to agree with his pet belief.

When he saw me go down before his murderous shot, he must have felt there was, practically, nothing between him and the insurance money. McCurdy was dead, King was dead, and he had every reason to believe I was dead. Only Judith remained of all who

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knew of his wicked plans. And how could she cope with a subtle, conscienceless villain like Gilbert? I have not the slightest doubt he rode home that pleasant summer night, with heart and mind perfectly at rest. The killing of a couple of men would perhaps trouble his conscience about as much as the killing of a couple of squirrels. However this may be, he did, in fact, return to the home of his friend, where he and Beulah remained for a week.

The reader will be interested to know that El Agua is only about thirty-five miles, by wagon road, from Calypso. Beulah and Gilbert, for some reason, decided to ride over there. They borrowed horses from their host and set out early one morning, intending to return the next day. I do not know why they did this. I have read of a mysterious law which inevitably operates to drag a murderer back to the scene of his crime. Is there such a law? Was this an illustration of its operation?

Undoubtedly Gilbert himself had not read any newspapers while in the house of the old soldier who sheltered him. Yet, there had perhaps been no other seven days of his life, since he learned to read, when the contents of the papers could have had more interest for him. On the very day when he tried to assassinate me, a queer series of accidents in the neighborhood of El Agua had culminated in a startling sensa-

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tion—a sensation which stirred the community from center to circumference; and the facts had been duly chronicled by the reporters for the press. Some knowledge of these events may be of interest to the reader—especially if he believes that this world is governed by chance.

In El Agua, as the reader will remember, there lived a family named Lindsay. In the country, about five miles from the town, lived a family named Linsey. Each family owned a lot in the El Agua cemetery. It is a rather singular fact that, up to the time of Herman Lindsay's death, nobody had been buried in either lot. Now the sexton, misled no doubt by the similarity of names, had buried young Lindsay on the lot belonging to the Linseys. The mistake was perhaps excusable on the ground that the last named family lived some miles away, and were not well known in El Agua. Shortly before the Calypso tragedy, a member of the Linsey family died, and the mistake was discovered. The Lindsay's offered to exchange lots; they offered to buy any other unoccupied lot in the place, and deed it to the other people; but the head of the Linsey family, being an obstinate, pig-headed sort of person, would not agree; and so the remains had to be moved.

Anybody can guess what happened then; and any man who has lived in a small town can imagine the

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sensation that followed. They found the murdered detective and they did not find the other. This happened, strange to say, on the day when Gilbert shot me, and killed McCurdy.

As already intimated, the man with the scar on his hand had been a member of a celebrated detective agency in an Eastern city. For some old misdeed, the nature of which I do not know, these people had been on Gilbert's trail for a long time. Beulah told how the man with the scar had visited the house three times, and, on the morning after my arrival there with Gilbert, this mysterious stranger even attempted to interview Gilbert in his home. To me it is rather interesting to note how strangely the fates, or the destinies, or providence, seemed to draw these two men together. On that day, Gilbert and the detective were actually in the same neighborhood unknown to each other. Just then, for some reason, the spy gave up the chase and returned to his employers. Later, he was detailed to go to Joplin on some business for his agency. It appears that he finished his work there and came, entirely of his own motion, to El Agua, to see if he could pick up Gilbert's trail. He found it, unfortunately for himself. Was it accident that the two met, where neither had been before, for months? The man was missed, of course, and his friends at the agency tried to find him; but they tried in vain. They may

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have suspected that Gilbert had killed him, for they guessed their agent had again attempted to locate that desperate character; but they could not trace Gilbert any more than they could find their missing comrade.

When his remains were discovered and described in the newspapers, his employers immediately sent two men to El Agua. They were furnished with complete descriptions of Gilbert and Beulah. One of them was watching the place when the brother and sister arrived from Calypso. Was this an accident?

The man returned to the village and organized a posse, which, under the leadership of the sheriff, attempted to make the arrest. They failed to surprise Gilbert, and he was not the man to surrender. Several members of the posse were killed. The house was set on fire, and Gilbert, shielding his sister with his own body, as well as he could, passed through a storm of bullets, from the house to the stable. It is believed Beulah was wounded in this flight, for when they rode out of the barn a little later they were both mounted on one horse and Gilbert appeared to support her. Before they had gone fifty yards the animal fell, mortally wounded, carrying his riders down and pinning them to the ground. When the pursuers ventured to approach they discovered Gilbert's left arm encircled Beulah's dead form, his right hand grasped a revolver, every chamber of which was empty, and the sheriff,

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bending over him, heard these faint words, "Com—ing, Beu—lah."

Such was the tragic but fitting climax of the career of the fiend who had been the sole cause of my entanglement, and who shot me down when my existence had become a hindrance, instead of a help, to his nefarious plans. In his hands I was only a tool, unwilling but without power to resist; all the responsibility, here and beyond, must rest with him. And those who blame me for putting myself into Gilbert's power I would remind of Wordsworth's "men who can hear the decalogue and feel no self-reproach."

The career of that chosen tool of Satan, who caused so many innocent persons much of sorrow and of pain, is a page from life's drama which should teach conclusively that he who breaks or transgresses the ten commandments must eventually pay the penalty.

While Gilbert's and Beulah's death put an end to the insurance affair, there was some little stir and newspaper notoriety about the disappearance of King and McCurdy. If McCurdy's body was ever found the papers failed to mention it. As to King, I do not know where or how he met his sorrowful fate. This must remain one of the mysterious secrets of the forrests of southern Missouri.

Providence, kinder to me than many of my townspeople, had guided my faltering steps through many vicissitudes to safety, and I resolved that I could show

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my gratitude to my Maker in no better way than by leading an upright, honorable life thenceforward.

I consequently returned to the home of my boyhood, in Tudorville, resumed at once the practice of my profession, and can truthfully say that, with prayer and repentance, I have kept my resolution. With one exception, to be mentioned below, all connection with the weird past was severed forever, and I have learned to remember it only as a horrible dream. The ugly rumors circulated by my enemies failed to trouble my soul, although they may have injured me in the estimation of thoughtless people.

As to Judith? Should I, at this late day, complain of her treatment of me? No. Let it go—let it all go. I have forgiven her from the bottom of my heart. As soon as I learned of Beulah's death, I wrote to Judith. The letter was not answered. Three times, within the next twelve months, I wrote to her. Eloquent, impassioned letters they were—letters which might have melted a heart of stone. They were penitent letters, too. It is written that there is joy in heaven when a sinner repents; but if there was joy in Judith's heart when I repented, she kept it to herself. After the first year, I wrote to her every six months, for four years. In the beginning of the sixth year, I received a letter from her. If I were a vain, egotistical man, as my enemies say, nothing could be more in keeping with my character than the suppression of this letter, and nothing could be easier. Yet, because I have set out to

MICHAEL CARMICHAEL.

tell the whole truth, I will conceal nothing, at any sacrifice of worldly pride. If there are any people who, after reading these pages, still believe I have been a great sinner, it may be well for them to know what I have been made to suffer. Here is Judith's last letter to me:

"Michael Carmichael,
Tudorville, Missouri.

"Sir:—

"I send you to-day, in another package, the letters you have written to me since August, 18—. I have no wish to write anything that may seem harsh or unkind, more than is absolutely necessary. For, indeed, I owe you some thanks, and I am quite willing to pay the debt here. It was you who, in the providence of God, opened my eyes and enabled me to see you as—I think—heaven sees you. For this I render thanks daily, on my knees, to my Maker. And but for you, I might never have met the noble Christian gentleman whose wife I am. It ought not to be hard for you to believe, under the circumstances, that, if this contains anything to pain you, it is not there because I bear you any ill will. You have written much about the desolation of your life, and, in all your letters, you have assumed, as a thing about which there could be no question, that my life must be desolate to the same extent, and for the same reason—the reason being the failure of our marriage engagement. In that you were mistaken. It would be idle—and untrue, for me to say I did not suffer when I began to understand something of your true character. I am thankful to say that the discovery was gradual, for I did not get the final, hideous glimpse of your soul, until the last; lingering vestige of my love for you was gone from my heart. The final revelation came in the letter you wrote, while the blood

MICHAEL CARMICHAEL'S REPENTANCE

of the unhappy creature who was your wife was still fresh upon her grave, announcing that you were free to enter into new matrimonial relations. Were you foolish enough to believe that I could be blind to the truth in that matter? Could any sane person fail to see that you were implicated in the murder for which your companions in crime suffered? Nevertheless, you were right when you so freely, and so copiously, dwelt upon my suffering; yet I doubt if you ever realized the extent or the true cause of my anguish. In all of your letters there is one fact which you appear to have overlooked. Has it never occurred to you that the man to whom I gave my heart, was, to me, a pure, high-minded honorable, Christian? He was not a swindler, a thief, or a murderer—in fact or with intention. One day this man, whom I truly loved, disappeared. He did not come back. Some one came, indeed,—some one who bore the physical likeness of the man I had loved; but it was not the same. This one—this last, was not able to hide his soul from me, and I saw that it was unclean, leprous. (I hope you will pardon me. I do not wish to be rude. I only wish to be exact.) I thank God I had the will and the power to exorcise this ghost—this phantom who bore the likeness of the man I had loved, and to send it back to the dark limbo whence it came.

“Therefore, if you are troubled lest, in losing you, I have missed happiness, be at rest. I am a happy woman in a happy home. It may interest you to know that I am married to the lawyer who was Mr. Wickham’s attorney in that memorable lawsuit in which you were concerned. His name, as you may remember, is Scantling—not a very romantic name; but it is the name of a good man. We have been married three years. I think you believe me to be truthful. Hence you will believe me when I say I am happy with my husband—and my baby boy.

“JUDITH WYMORE SCANTLING.”

THE END.

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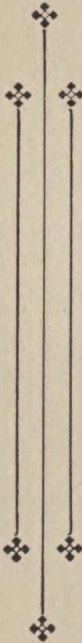
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